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"Grace, there has been something I have been wanting to ask you"

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MISS INGALIS

BY

GERTRUDE HALL
Author of "Aurora the Magnificent," "The Truth About Camilla," etc.

NEW YORK
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1918

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EN SOUVENIR
DE NOS MILLE SOUVENIRS

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MISS INGALIS

CHAPTER I

HE had called at her house before, one night of snow. The woman in black who came to the door—visibly not a servant—had told him Miss Ingalis was absent. She had made way for him to enter, so that she might shut out the cold, and in the hallway had imparted the further knowledge that her sister was in the West Indies; she had gone the first of February and was not expected home until the second week in March.

"A friend, passing through the city on her way down there," she said, "picked up Grace at an hour's notice and took her along."

He had not known he could feel so dejected by not getting a sight of her at the end of that first pilgrimage to her dwelling. Tightening his overcoat to breast the icy wind, he had laid balm to himself by picturing her amid sunshine and warmth, palm-trees, pomegranates, hibiscus. He praised the friend who had had eyes to see that she was paler than she should be,—thinner, too, though that aërial thinness was so charming,—and had whisked her away for a holiday.

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She continued to haunt his thoughts, as she had done for some months. He entered what might be called the fourth period of his sentiment with regard to her.

The first was curious to remember. He had wished to know who was guilty of certain remarkably poor specimens appearing on the screen at every contest of the composition class in company with his own strong sketches and many more giving evidence, each in some degree, of power and promise. She had been pointed out to him, and he had wondered what made her try to be an artist. He had not thought her very interesting.

His interest had been awakened in time by a miserable little pastel that he found pinned near his own illustration of "Poverty." Amid thirty pictures setting forth, every one of them, the sordid horrors of poverty,—emaciated children, ragged beggars, want, filth,—there had shone forth faintly just one of a different inspiration: hers, badly drawn as usual, badly composed, showing the pure and glorious bride of Saint Francis. Something within him had bowed and done homage.

He had looked at her more attentively, and entered the second period. One can be an execrable painter, yet an exquisite person.

She looked as if she might have passed through some great sorrow and were still sad, though trying not to let it be seen. She wore mourning for her father.

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He believed her to be poor, like himself. That she was delicately bred was more than evident. Poverty was perhaps new to her, and the pursuit of art her innocent conception of going to work.

She ceased coming to the art school soon after, and he saw her no more until one of the richer students held at her house a reunion of her fellow students. To this she also came, still in black, but a black less funereal; and he hardly left her side during the whole evening. They talked of their favorite authors. In answer to his prayer at parting for permission to call on her, she told him where she lived. There began the third period.

And now the middle of March had come, when she must be home again. He could not disguise from himself a certain emotion as he set forth a second time for her house.

His little mother asked him where he was going, and he satisfied her curiosity as kindly as he could without telling her anything. But he kissed her with real fondness. She had been so good to him; his debt was always present to his mind. To afford him the education that was to make possible his rise in the world, she had taken lodgers. For years. While he mixed paints on a palette, she cared for the rooms of untidy bachelors and exacting old maids. He was determined to repay her. That the pearl of girls stood on a spiritual eminence which enabled her to see poverty as sacred, that she could never feel scorn for

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the poor little hard-worked widow, his mother, enhanced her preciousness, her fitness in his dreams, still misty though these were.

And so he came to her house, a small house in an unfashionable neighborhood once in better social standing. Again the older sister opened the door, —a very much older sister, he thought: by the ring on her finger, married. He could not perceive that she possessed one grain of the younger sister's charm.

"Yes, she is back," he heard with relief. "Won't you come into the parlor? I will tell her. Mr. Andreas Dane. I remember perfectly."

She opened the door into an unlighted room. While she felt for the matches and while he waited, he became aware of an odor like that in a florist's shop, a commingling of roses and carnations.

The gas-flame sprang into being, the room into sight, and his eyes fell upon what they should have been prepared for—a vase full of burning crimson roses and another vase full of white clove-pinks.

Being left alone, he looked around him like one accustomed to seeking among things for indications of character. Here were the furnishings, unmistakably, of people of refinement, but—he noted it with a kind of comfort—the carpet was old, like the carpets he was used to, the upholstery needed renovating. A folding-door permitted a partial view of the back room, by every sign a study.

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He gave a moment's attention to the pictures on the wall, witnesses of a scholarly taste; but from each excursion the odor of the roses called him back and became the cause of a curious uneasiness, an oppression, not often created by a fragrance so wholesome and so sweet. It troubled him, like a suspicion, a presentiment.

He stood by the mantel, alert for her coming, and had time while waiting to feel awkward and overlarge, coarse of hand and foot, ugly.

He half turned for a glance at himself in the mirror. He was, in truth, rather ugly; but it was a nice ugliness, a cleanly, manly, endearing ugliness, which he could not be expected to appreciate. He looked thoughtful; he looked modest; he looked kind. And if his face did not at once give the measure of his fine capacity, his talents would the more be a happy discovery to any person going deeper than the surface. Just now, however, he was humiliated by the sight of his reflection. And he was not given to caring about his looks. It was the fault of those too large, too redolent, too rich roses.

Then he heard her footstep on the stair, and the mental image of her descending to him supplanted every other. He could see her in anticipation with great clearness—her adorable slimness, like a flower-stem's; her little head, with the careless coils and blowing wisps of young girls who frequent art schools; the dainty pallor of her face above the black dress;

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the languor of her smile when she to that extent overcame her melancholy. . . .

She stood in the doorway, and all his other feelings were merged in surprise. She was not the same person. To begin with, she had shed the mourning to which he had grown accustomed. She was dressed in silks, softly gay, enriched by costly laces; her hair had a look of pretty formality and fashion. And she had discarded sadness, even as she had mourning.

She brought into the room an addition of perfume. On her breast lay violets in a thick knot—violets that made one jealous. He felt his courage forsaking him.

But after a few minutes' talk he regained something of her reality and became a little reassured. Her smile had a feverish brightness, but her eyes were unchanged—brown eyes that had nothing about them of Spanish or Oriental, eyes with a characteristic look of spiritual curiosity, a deep-seated, half-troubled preoccupation with spiritual values. He felt at home with them, and presently began again to hope.

She led the way into the neighboring room, which contained a literary workman's large writing-desk, only it was cold and orderly, as it could not have been for one moment during his life. She lighted the drop-lamp, and with her new animation made her visitor admire the curiosities she had brought back from the islands—baskets, pottery, corals, shells.

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"It has been too, too wonderful!" she said. "I can hardly believe it yet."

She pressed a hand to her forehead, as if to get a firmer hold on her thoughts and make sure she was not taking dreams for waking.

"I came home from my work one afternoon—I must have told you that after giving up the art school I was learning the kindergarten method, so as to be able to teach—I came home and found a friend I had not seen for several years, Mrs. Lamont, waiting for me here. She had married, and was taking her husband—he is a retired army officer—on a sea voyage to make him well of a cold that worried her.

"She is such a dear, Ida Lamont!" she interpolated enthusiastically. "Except for liking each other so much, you might say our acquaintance was very slight before this trip together. We had met at a hotel in the mountains where we only spent two weeks—my father and I. But she had said that if ever she came to this city she would look us up. And she did. As soon as she saw me, she decided I must go with them. And, mind you, it was almost a honeymoon she was going on. Yet she wanted to take me along. Don't you call it noble of her?

"I had n't time for anything; she did n't give me time to think. We started that same evening for New York, and next day we sailed. In a blizzard. I shall never forget the mean ferocity of the weather that day. Then gradually, gradually, it became

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quieter, milder, warmer, brighter. One after another, we dropped our winter wraps. And then it was all blueness and wonder. We came in sight of land, and it was tropical—banana-trees and palms and sugar-cane plantations, with little gray cabins along the shore. . . ."

"I am glad for you—to have escaped our disagreeable February," he said, with a dry throat. "In a few days spring will begin."

"It has been like a fairy story, a transformation scene," she continued. "Almost before we were out of the harbor, Mrs. Lamont said she could not bear to see me in black, and made me give up mourning. She had her maid take in one of her own dresses to fit me. This that I have on is one of hers. Did you ever hear of such generosity?"

His breast was eased, as if a physical weight had been lifted from it. He found a ready tongue again. They talked for a while of travel and tropics. Then she wished to hear about his fortunes, and showed a kind gladness at the news of posters and frontispieces he had been commissioned to supply.

"Isn't it singular," she said, "how one can never tell what is round the corner? A reason why we ought never to despair. On Saturday you may be trudging with half-frozen feet to work you hate, because it 's so uncongenial, and Saturday of the week after may find you on an enchanted island where the maddest fairy stories and romances come to pass."

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He became uneasy again, because her glance, fixed actually on the worn carpet, rested with a brooding air, a happy wonder, on scenes that he could not guess at. While she was thus occupied with visions of Caribbean seas and skies, one of her hands played with a ring on the other hand, a ring sparkling with newness.

Could Mrs. Lamont be the donor of that too?

It formed a rather startling ornament for the slender, brownish hand whose mate—as he had had occasion to remark—handled the pencil so nervelessly; it shared some quality with the massed roses and acutely odorous pinks. It was composed of one great drop of ruby fire and a diamond imprisoning one great drop of quintessential light. The sight of it produced a return of his faint sickness of soul.

"And now?" he forced himself to speak. "Do you think of going back to the work you left—the kindergarten?"

She smiled as she very softly shook her head in the negative. He was made to wait a moment before anything was added to that answer.

"No."

She looked at him as if she thought he ought to be able to guess the reason; and, after a little pause that gave him time to do so, said that which, ever since his first sight of those insolent roses, he had been fearing to hear:

"I am going to be married."

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The words he uttered right after this were so mechanical that he did not know what they were. They drew forth, however, a little amplification on her part:

"It is a name you must often have heard—or, if not heard, seen. Overcome."

"Can you mean—Overcome Brothers? The big men's-clothing house?"

"Yes. It is the youngest of the brothers, Clarence. He was a fellow passenger on board the *Pretoria,* an acquaintance of Mrs. Lamont's."

She looked musingly at her ring, and again smiled.

"Almost funny, isn't it? If, by any chance, before this I thought of the possibility of marrying, I supposed, of course, it would be somebody literary or artistic—or a professor—or at least a professional man. It 's part of what makes it so like a fairy story. A fairy prince would n't have to be artistic or professional, would he?" she asked with merry frankness.

Andreas Dane did not shorten his call because he was in pain. He did not find everything changed by the fact that this young girl was promised to another. Something of her, he persisted in believing, belonged to him through the affinity he had been so sure of. Her brown eyes in no wise shut him out, though their new radiance was due to circumstances which, after this evening, would banish him. They were sincere and friendly. Were they also a little

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pitying? . . . Since she was no longer a damsel in the position of being tried and, if found satisfactory, honored with the offer of one's name, but a poignantly lovely and desirable woman forever out of reach, his heart jumped to a quick knowledge of itself, and he remained as late as possible, to get what pleasure he could from being near her gentle beauty, and to carry away the more to remember.

He had not come with the definite idea of looking for his happiness, or with the certitude that it lay there: but he went out into the March night—and, as far as he knew, out of her life—with the gloomy distaste for existence of one who feels no doubt of having lost Paradise.

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CHAPTER II

AS she climbed the stairs after the departure of her caller, Grace Ingalis was careful to make no hoise. With velvet tread she passed the black gap of a half-open door on the second-floor landing—successfully, she hoped. But when she turned out the spark of gas that had been left burning in the hall, a woman's voice rose in the dark above a husband's modest snore.

"Your young man stayed a good deal later than is decent, it seems to me. Could n't you have sent him home earlier?"

No reply.

"Have you locked up?"

"Yes, dear, I have."

"Did you put up the chain?"

"Yes, dear, I did."

"And turn out the lights?"

"Yes. Good night, Lydia dear. Pleasant dreams."

When she reached her bedroom on the floor above, Grace had already forgotten the annoyance of that questioning. Her thoughts followed Andreas Dane. She had become conscious, before the end, of some smothered suffering at her side. Though wondering and half doubting, she had laid it to the right cause.

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Thinking it over, she said to herself that she was sorry for him, and sent after him a great heartful of good will. At the same time she warmed with pride. She felt her value increased by his estimate of it, her pleasure in this resting mainly on the fact that it gave her more to bestow on another man.

It was difficult to recall how she had regarded Andreas before. She tried, and was surprised anew to find how everything belonging to the time preceding the first of February—only six weeks ago!—seemed part of another existence. But she knew well enough that she had shared the general admiration of the girls' portion of the art school for the young fellow whose work made that of every other look weak in execution and trivial of fancy. She had been flattered by his assiduity on the evening they had spent so largely in a corner together, talking of Keats and Shelley.

Instead of being sleepy, as the hour warranted, she was keenly awake, too greatly excited to care about going to bed for a long time yet. This was well, since she had a happy task to perform.

She sat down at the cluttered table under the gas-globe and, with bright eyes fixed on her imaginings, nibbled the end of a pen-holder. Then she wrote:

"I promised to write you this evening, but it is almost to-morrow. Are you still at your Athletic Club, I wonder? Very likely. But if you are smok-

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ing and talking with brawny athletes, and not thinking one bit of me, it 's not fair, for I am sitting up into the small hours, thinking of you and writing to prove it.

"Do you know, I almost think it a good thing that there should be evenings when you are unable to come and I must write you, because there are things I never can say when you are here, yet I want you to know them. When we are together we do nothing but fool—which, my dear sir, is wholly your fault. As soon as you have gone I think of things I had meant to say and that seeing you put out of my mind. No, it 's not that, either; I don't know what it is. I can't say certain things to you, and yet I want you to know them. They are things you ought to be glad to know, it seems to me, and writing gives me the chance.

"I had a caller this evening; that is what makes it so late. It was a person I had not seen since before I knew you; and I got back so clearly the feeling of the past, the part of my life to which you did not belong. Clare, I could almost feel sorry for myself when I look back at the gray, terrible days of the last year and a half, before Ida came on the scene—the days between my dear father's death and my sailing away on the ship that carried us both. Happily, they have come to seem far, far away; an eternity divides me from them. But this evening, as I was saying, brought them back.

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"There are things you can never know, Clare. One of them is what it feels like to be faced with the problem of earning a living, and discovering that you are too stupid to do it in any of the ways that could contain a little satisfaction, a little zest, anything but hateful drudgery.

"I am afraid poor Papa spoiled me. I grew up thinking quite well of myself; I supposed I had talents. So I tried to write; I tried music; I even tried to paint—to have it finally impressed upon me that no one would ever want any of it. Then I buckled down to what was real work, within the commonest capacity—teaching small children. And the dreariness of it, Clare, I can never describe. Perhaps I should have grown to like it. They say that doing your duty brings its reward, and I believe it. But I was dreadfully far from that point.

"What I am telling you all this for, dear Clare, is not to give you an idea of the difference you have made, but to say that I look back upon the person I was then, who dragged through the work of the day, 'unhappy like the stones,' as they say in French, with surprise and scorn. I can't place myself back in her shoes and understand how she could be such a coward. That, you see, is the great difference. Now I could stand all I had to stand then and still keep a song in my heart. If it were part of my great task of trying to make you happy, would I not with a cheerful smile teach kindergarten? Or do

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anything else—fix your dinner for you in a tin pail, for example, or help you to weed the potato-patch.''

She paused in her writing, and with shining eyes went through these devoted performances in imagination, and in imagination received full thanks.

It was cold at the top of the house. The furnace was so managed as to burn economically during the night; even by day the heat rather lost courage before rising so high. The window-frames were shaking in the wind. Grace trembled, in spite of the shawl wrapped around her. But this did not dispose her to shorten her letter—in which she was consistent, since writing a letter at any time is less work than weeding a potato-patch. Presently she resumed:

''Our whole voyage takes on for me the aspect of a symbol. Do you remember the bitter spitefulness of the weather on the day we sailed? It was winter like that all through me. Then came the warmer and warmer gold-and-blue days. I opened my heart, just as I did my traveling-cloak, to let it in. I had never really been alive before. I had not imagined, when I tried my best to be a poet, that life could be like that, so miraculous—one's destiny so unforeseen and miraculous,—you, Clare, so miraculous! The whole difference was like the difference between the storm we left port in and the heavenly atmosphere we

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found in Saint Thomas. It all entered my soul and saturated me; so that when, on the way back, it grew colder and colder again, I found it only delightful, bracing, tonic. I carried my climate within me, you see."

She finished with the happy assurance that he would care to read these things, though she would not have been permitted to say them, being strictly denied the rôle of debtor or flatterer or sentimentalist. He would care to read them because the expression of her sense of what she owed to him was, after all, nothing more than an expression of love.

If writing a letter in the cold, late hours is less laborious than weeding a potato-patch, the merit of going out to post it after one o'clock in the morning should count equal at least to picking off the caterpillars. Grace stole past her sister's door like a mouse. The manly breathing proceeding from it covered an unavoidable creaking of the stairs. She let down the door-chain without a clank, made the key turn without grating, and, leaving the door on the latch, flitted like a shadow to the letter-box at the corner lamp-post.

Grace paused in her undressing to think of her father. She took a photograph from its place at the head of her bed, and, gazing at it, tried earnestly to commune with him. The imaged face had the peer-

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ing, puzzled look of a man who wants immensely and vainly to understand this world, more enigmatical to him than to stupider people; a man justly and reasonably maddened, beneath his habit of regardful gentleness, by the inconsequence of people and the contumacy of things. The face had a critical, quarrelsome air, an air of pugnacity, checked and made of no effect by the continual self-admonishment, "What is the good? They know no better."

But Grace saw in it chiefly affection. So close a tie had existed between her and her father that she was never going to let it be loosened, never let him become any less a part of her daily life. As she gazed she tried to think of him, in the unimaginable circumstances of his present existence, rejoicing over the good fortune that had come to her. She even thought that her happiness might in some way be due to his care.

In the forenoon there came, brought by hand, an answer to her letter. It is perhaps not necessary to say that Grace had seen her fiancé on the morning of the day before, and expected to see him on the evening of the same day; but we utilize the occasion to mention that this exchange of letters took place at a time when the telephone was not yet in common use. Lovers still wrote to each other.

With a joyful throb, she unfolded the large sheet

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of office paper, half covered with his bold, clear handwriting, and read:

"Right you were. I was still at the Athletic Club while you were writing, O accomplished in the art. I don't mind telling you that we smoked too much, drank too much, and talked too much. I am not answering your letter, much too good for a plain man. I pass it all over till it comes to the passage where you speak of trying to make me happy. Persevere, O Amiable One, in that laudable ambition, and you may, with diligence, succeed. I have my dark projects, too, in that line.

"But to turn from these frivolities. London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady. Which will you take for a guard-ring, a diamond hoop or alternate diamonds and pearls?"

The young woman who read could see the smile of the young man who thus wrote. She could feel his eyes and the spell of his personality. She found in the brief note as much manly tenderness as she could wish.

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CHAPTER III

THE youngest of the Overcome Brothers found it too long to wait till Sunday before going over the house, newly acquired,—which was referred to as the "new house,"—in company with its prospective mistress. The place, in process of redecoration, was filled with carpenters and painters.

During this round of inspection Grace was more than once assailed by the feeling, frequent of late, of it all being so improbable that she must not too entirely believe in it. The rooms appeared to her palatial. Life on a grandiose scale was indicated by the very names of the many rooms for separate uses—butler's pantry, billiard-room, linen-room, laundry, cedar-closet, wine-cellar. She was not unfamiliar with luxury, but had known it only as guest and passer-by, with never a thought of envy. The homes that had seen her grow to her twenty-two years had been modest, and the living simple; it had seemed a good deal to have one's own house. The leap from cottage to castle did not so much elate as excite her and give her moments—as has already been told—of doubting that the ironical deception could last.

The acquisition of wealth, however, was less strange

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than the acquisition of Clare. Truly, a rajah, blazing with rubies and emeralds, would not have seemed more removed from her than he had at first sight. And wherefore? She could not have told. That he was not "her kind" was the best she would have found to say, voicing the common fallacy that a handsome, daring, full-blooded king of good fellows must be looking for some brilliant counterpart of himself.

Instead, his eyes, meeting hers, had begun courtship at once. She had been lifted as if by a warm flood, and carried along on glistening, hastening waves; she had come to consciousness of herself as capable of infinite affection—astonishing, passionate affection—for this man who such a little time before had been a stranger.

"This, then, is what it is like," she had said, with a sense of great riches, and looked back with pity on her pale conceptions of love in the colorless past. It covered everything; it tinged everything; so that, while walking through the empty rooms of the new house beside him, she was not using her judgment with regard to the hues and shapes selected for their embellishment—she was accepting all as being of necessity admirable, since it suited him.

It was with those things as with many others that had regard to Clare: taken by themselves, they might not have been to one's taste; but taking them as part of the content of that conquering personality, one

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lost the disposition to discriminate. Clare could do those things, Clare could say those things, because—because, simply, there was so much life in his fiery blue eye, glow in his cheek, light in his smile, and harmony in his features. Then there was such strength in the whole of his well proportioned body—and strength so sure of itself. Those were the things you were really heeding, warming yourself at, when, if you had wisely kept your critical faculty unentangled, you might have been able to give valuable hints and perhaps save the decoration of your house from being utterly obvious and middle-class.

In that which was to be the drawing-room two men were laying a floor of varied woods; in the dining-room a man with a paint-soiled apron was helping out the carving of the black marble mantel-piece and fireplace with lines of gold. A noise of planing came from somewhere.

When the owner and his intended had been from bottom to top of the house, and were looking for a place in which to tarry a moment out of sight of the workmen and get a foretaste of the restful delight of home, they returned naturally to the one room that was finished and already contained a little furniture.

Here the effort after beauty was marked and, in its way, successful. Panels of turquoise brocade inclosed by gilt moldings, below a frieze of rose garlands, were reflected in four fine mirrors set in the

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blue panels. The bare floor was a light, smooth yellow. The suggestion of the whole was that it had been designed for a feminine occupant or occupants. The ample, uncurtained windows overlooked the river, whose farther bank of crowded city buildings took on a poetic air under the sunset.

Grace and Clare, standing in the doorway, looked for the second time slowly around the room.

"Clare," she broke the silence, "how does it happen? What were you, a bachelor, going to do with such a big, imposing residence?"

"Settle down in it and wait for you, O maid with the delicate air!" he said.

"You thought I was a blonde, did you?" she lightly asked. "Sure as I live, this room was planned with a blue-eyed, golden-haired sister of Venus in your eye. So sorry, Clare, to disappoint you."

Only with Clare was she accustomed to talk in this vein. She had learned to banter, so as to play up to him in the style of comedy he affected. Learned? It came easily when she was in the mood that his presence provoked.

In answer to her "So sorry, Clare," he drew her from the open doorway to a part of the room sheltered from passing eyes, and embraced her. As always, she turned her head away and let his kiss fall beneath her ear. She could not overcome the feeling that there was something wrong about accepting his

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kiss. She let him take her in his arms—it was now his right. The answering warmth with which she melted to him, when in his clasp, was very sweet, yet never perfectly so. An element of anguish, fear, refusal, was always in it. Some inveterate result of her bringing up, she supposed. But such conduct was inconsistent, for she was allured as a moth toward flame by the prospect of those endearments from which, when the moment came, she shrank.

The lover seemed to understand how it was; he had intelligence and tact sufficient never to press his advantage, but to take without contention what was granted him of the virginal, shy face. It was sweet enough under her little ivory ear, still such a novel delight to him; her hair was sweet and soft and fragrant enough. The security of possession made waiting easy. The appropriate caress, anyhow, seemed to be, in her case, an inhalation, as of a flower, rather than a kiss. He drew in a long emotional breath and sighed it out again.

"This room must be changed!" he said briskly, when next he spoke. He looked around him, and then meditatively at her. She was what he called a study in browns. Her hair, with its dim dusting of gold, was only a little lighter than her eyes, which had soft brown shadows over the lids and around them; her cheeks were brown in the last, palest dilution; only her mouth was pink, a faint pink, almost anemic, in the midst of which her lustrous teeth

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showed attractively even, like the pearls of a necklace.

"This robin's-egg blue has got to go," he said decidedly, "and yellow—a Marshal Niel rose yellow—take its place. What do you say? And the floor stained dark. What? It 's for you to choose. This room is going to be what you may call your bondoor, if you fancy the word. These chairs, I guess, will tone in with yellow."

He began tearing the paper off a chair, one of four still in their wrappings. She watched it emerge with natural interest: gilt, with blue seat and back, medallions of pink roses.

"I picked them up at an auction," he took the trouble to explain. "Joking apart, I had no idea of living in this house myself. I was getting it into shape to let. I did n't buy it; I came by it. The firm had had a mortgage on it for years. This was finally foreclosed. But how handy it comes in, eh?"

He was tearing the wrappings now from the sofa, which, with two armchairs, completed the set.

"You bought them at an auction, did you say?" she asked, but unsuspiciously. "They look brand-new."

"I guess they are new," he said without embarrassment. "It was a furniture-store selling out after bankruptcy."

They seated themselves on the sofa he had uncovered, and leaned back, with her gloved left hand and

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his bare right lying clasped in the space between them,—so diverse, the two, and each penetrated with a peculiar joy in the other's difference: he, so sturdy, filled with the ruddy color of life to the roots of his black hair, suggesting in all his person a fitness for fighting like that of the Roman gladiator of whom, with his cropped and curly round head, his broad neck, he at times reminded Grace; she, belonging to a much later stage of the human advance, with little left of that primitive red force, but a shadow over her features which made her appear costly, somehow, the inheritor of generations who had accumulated treasures of a kind impalpable, distinguished, superior.

"Well?" he asked. "How do you think you like my folks?"

"Like them? They are wonderful!" was the ready and gratifying answer. "What a dinner-party last night! I was bewildered; there were so many of them; there was so much. What a house, Clare—what a houseful! Don't ask me for separate impressions. It was as if a band had been playing, a loud, jolly band, till I could n't think."

"They 're a coarse-grained lot!" he brought in bluffly.

"Coarse? What do you mean? I found them perfectly delightful; one and all—genial, bright, full of life. It looked as if they, the dinner-table, the house, everything, had come tumbling out of an enor-

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mous horn of plenty. You must n't expect me to tell your numerous family apart quite yet. But your sister, I know, will never cease to be my favorite. Not because she was my first friend among them, but because she has been so nice. I was nervous yesterday evening,—it 's in the part, is n't it?—meeting them for the first time, and she furnished me with moral support. What a kind, lively, loveable person!"

"Theresa 's all right."

"How nice for you all to live together like that! And rather unusual, is n't it?"

"There 's a lot more of us who don't live in the house you saw last night. We 're a big tribe. I 'm one of eight, among brothers and sisters, all married but me."

"I hope—" said Grace, with her eyes demurely turned away from him and downward—"I hope they liked me, too."

"Well!" he exclaimed, and halted expressively, to produce a commensurate effect of irony. "We are not quite swine, I hope, O pearl!"

Shamefacedly and hurriedly, to banish the idea that she desired compliments from him or the report of any pleasant things that might have been spoken of her by her future family, Grace asked:

"And how do you like my folks, Clare? Tell me."

"Immense! Oh, immense! *Rare!*"

At his exaggerated emphasis, she looked directly at

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him. He smiled straight into her eyes, as if confident that she must at bottom be in sympathy with his view of the persons in question.

"*First rate!*" he went on, still emphasizing. "Like 'em first rate. Love to have 'em for mine. No pretense about it, Grace. But, tell me true,"—the narrowing gleam of his eye had the significance of a wink,—"did n't your brother-in-law at some time during his careless childhood get a knock on the head that flattened his bump of fun?"

She began to laugh, then refrained.

"Poor Batey!" she sighed, finding it impossible to stand up for him as, perhaps, she ought.

"Or Batey *Poor*. Is n't that his providential name?"

"But my sister Lydia met with no such accident," she pressed on quickly in a different direction. "There 's plenty of fun in her. You like her, don't you?"

"Like her? I should say I did! A very fine woman. Lots to her,—character, spunk. I can see that. Want to keep on her good side. She daunts me with her eye."

Again he looked at her as if certain that, behind the decent hypocrisies called for by consanguinity, she saw the thing precisely as he did. Again the effect of a wink flashed in the depth of his mirthful eye.

"Don't you find she can daunt you too? Don't

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you grow uneasy when, with a steely glance, she sort of curdles the milk in your veins?"

Grace had to laugh, not at what he said, but at his look, which demanded a response of laughter, and free pardon for his irreverence.

But thereupon she said seriously, deprecatingly:

"You don't understand Lydia, Clare. She—she 's had such a trying time—so many disappointments—enough to sour anyone's nature. Not that I admit she is sour. She 's worried and preoccupied; the burden of everything always seems to fall on her.

"She married when I was approaching my teens, and went off, full of expectations and happiness, with Batey, who was a clergyman then. Yes, he used to be a clergyman. Perhaps that is what you noticed. Everything seemed bright and promising for them. But, somehow—I don't know. After a few years Batey left the Church. He could n't subscribe to every part of the creed, it seems. After that he did one thing after another, but nothing seemed to succeed. It 's easy to think it was his fault or their fault, and yet it never quite seemed to be, if one examined the facts and tried to be fair.

"When I was sixteen Mama died, and for several years Papa and I lived alone. I kept house for him; we have always had a house, even when there were only two of us, because we had such a lot of things —furniture and books, you know, such a lot of books —that had belonged to us all our lives and that we

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liked to keep around us. Then, in time, Lydia and Batey came back to make their home with us. Lydia has always kept her belief that Batey will find the right thing to do presently, and make a success. But somehow— You can see that the situation might take some of the humor out of him and some of the sweetness out of her. Since Papa died, too, Lydia has seemed to feel—she has—we have— Oh, I 'm not going to talk about all that just now! Only, I want you to like Lydia."

"Does n't wanting her in the worst kind of way for a sister show for liking her pretty well?"

"But truly, Clare, you ought to believe me when I tell you that nothing could be more unjust than not to love Lydia. I have only to remember when I was a little tot—her patience, the paper dolls she cut out for me, the beads she strung, the soap-bubbles she blew. Once, when I was getting over the measles, she—"

"Little one," he blocked her eagerly protective voice, "there 's no need of you telling me all this. Your people shall be my people and your— Yes. In earnest. We might be able to make a place in the store for brother Batey, if you think it would do —if he would n't feel too much above it."

His tone was full of regard for her feelings. The subject of relatives faded out of their conversation.

They went to stand at a window and watch the sky and river slowly paling after sunset. Then they

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strayed across the spacious landing, while the house echoed with emptiness, to the front room, and looked out of the bay-window up and down the street with the dignified darkening fronts of many other such houses as theirs.

It was very still; the workmen must have gone home. Though the windows were still light, the stairs, when they returned to them, were dark. Hearing her slide her foot to find the top step, he cautioned her:

"Wait! Don't try! You 'll break your bones!"

Without being asked for her consent, she felt herself lifted. She seemed very light to him, and he immensely strong to her. Yet she could not rest in his arms whole-heartedly and be borne downstairs like a child. He could feel her try to weigh as little as possible, touch him as little as possible. But this had attraction for him, like the soft flutter of a bird inside the hand that has captured it.

She remembered a thought of her childhood. Watching her father carry her mother upstairs, when the latter was weak after an illness, she had decided that she would never marry a man who could not carry her over the stairs.

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CHAPTER IV

GRACE, coming down late after oversleeping, was glad to find that no trouble had been taken to keep her breakfast hot, beyond turning a saucer over the oatmeal. This was according to her request. She felt less guilty so.

She sat down to it absent-mindedly. The basement dining-room was darker than usual, because of the rainy sky, but she did not mind the gloom this morning. Her eyes still retained an impression of brightness, and her ears of music, from the theater of yesterday evening.

Lydia could be heard stirring in the kitchen.

Batey sat at the window for the better light. He had exchanged "good mornings" with his sister-in-law upon her entrance, and then had spoken no more. This signified nothing except that he was busy reading his paper, and did not demand of himself, any more than Grace expected of him, sociability in the family. He would presently, it was quite possible, let her have some of the facts that interested him in the day's news. Meanwhile she hardly felt his presence in the room.

It would be difficult to describe Batey Poor more than from his outside of sallow features and black

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hair, because it was difficult to feel that one understood him. There was proof that he had a good intelligence and had received a good education; but why should there be so little of flower and fruit from a normal tree? Of foliage, even? If he had said, "You prick us; do we not bleed? You tickle us; do we not laugh?" why would one have been tempted to say, "No, you do not!" Was he less than an ordinary man, or more? Whichever way one answered the question, one found reason later to question the answer. He did no harm to anybody, but he did nobody any good, either, that one could see. Perhaps he did do a little harm by dulling the light and lowering the temperature wherever he was; on the other hand, he no doubt did a little good to Lydia, who incredibly, mysteriously, loved him.

Winfred Ingalis, his father-in-law, had applied an excellent mind to the study of Batey, he too with scant result. Positive only that Batey was not contented and did not content him, Winfred, having a taste for manipulating abstractions, had tried to fit him with imaginary circumstances amid which he would have been satisfied and satisfactory. He had stopped upon the idea that Batey ought to have been a Sicilian prince of no importance, living in a hot climate and a sleepy old palace, with nothing to do but read a little, ride a little, and go at evening to a café. He could see him as quite distinguished in a monochromatic, taciturn way.

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In the same way, he tried to arrange an ideal life for Lydia, his eldest child; but this he found more difficult, because, if she were to be happy, her particular faculties must be brought into play, and her points were order, prudence, economy, with the correlated virtues, not greatly demanded by the fairy story. Sometimes he settled her in life as mistress of ceremonies to a queen of Spain, with all the maids of honor under her discipline; but oftener he made her into a sublimated housekeeper, with servants and store-closets and a bunch of keys.

Part of the peering, puzzled look observable in Winfred Ingalis's photograph was due, no doubt, to pondering the mystery of both Lydia and Grace being his daughters, children of the same mother, outcome of the same conditions.

When it came to visions of Grace's future, a deep love interfered with his fixing upon any; human probabilities too much restricted the field. His sense of a father's impotence to shield his child forever bred in him the keener longing to place in her hands a lamp to guide herself by, and the greater despair that even this was more than one could be sure of accomplishing.

Grace was not one of those fortunate young women who look well at all times. The humor she was in had everything to do with her appearance. At a thought, an uplift of the spirit, beauty could dawn

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in her face like a star clearing its silver path through mist. At a pang of discouragement, disillusion, it could fade like the rose color out of a sunset cloud. Since coming home from the West Indies she had looked softly lovely all the time, not after the manner of the great heartbreakers among flowers,—rose, lily, gardenia,—but one of the secondary favorites, yet thoroughly sweet: a daffodil on its slender, thornless stem.

She cared about her looks, but not constantly. She knew that a girl can use them to captivate, as a fairy good or bad can use her wand; but a very little experience had made her afraid to do this, lest the result be a burden and a bore. A man she disliked had once pursued her with attentions; she had become careful not to arouse attention that might result in pursuit. She would not have been displeased to know that men were in love with her, but she could not endure being made love to.

When it came to Clare, needless to say, all this was changed. It was still a marvel, the simplicity with which, on their last evening aboard the *Pretoria,* when he caught her in a dark corner of the deck and said she had got to have him, she gave him his way.

And now, with the sense of being loved, she was bloomy and shiny-eyed even while eating lukewarm oatmeal and a cold egg.

Lydia came from the kitchen, and pulled out a sideboard drawer to place in it the handful of silver

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she had polished. She wore a spotless apron over a neat black dress. Lydia could do any kind of housework and not soil herself or her apron: it partook of the supernatural.

It was not altogether strange, perhaps, that, with her starched linen collar, her black hair compactly done, she should cast a look of disfavor at Grace, who, in hurrying so as not to be disgracefully late, had wound up her hair negligently and tied a careless pink scarf around her neck. But there was felt to be something subtly reprehensible likewise, something inconsiderate, in Grace's exhibition, through enhanced beauty, of inward warmth and content. Furthermore,—to account for the coolness of Lydia's eyes when resting on her sister,—there was Grace's standing offense of letting her do all the work. True, Grace wanted to help; but her way of going about it made Lydia so nervous that she declared she had ten times rather do it alone. Grace had more than once mildly ventured that she thought it would be better to have a servant. They had always had one; it seemed to her that they could even now afford a general housemaid. But Lydia had sniffed in contempt, and remarked that Grace evidently failed to grasp the financial situation.

The older sister now sat down at the table, as if to rest and be companionable for a few minutes while the other finished her breakfast.

There existed between the two an ordinary family

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likeness of proportion and texture; the wide difference was in their coloring and expression. Grace's brown pallor was warm beside Lydia's grayish whiteness. Lydia ought to have been the handsomer, if firmer, clearer, more classic lines could have achieved it; but those well carved features were the cover, too obviously, of bitter depths. The habitual look of Lydia's eye called the universe and every person in it to sharp account for the fact that things had not gone better with her and her mate. The universe could not be expected to like it. Grace felt sorry for her, to the point of trying not to mind the things Lydia said and did to her. She loyally held the belief that under it all her sister loved her.

"Well?" asked Lydia. "How was it last evening? Did you have a good time?"

Grace woke up and began telling about it. She related the play, scene by scene, laughing with a return of her first delight. After a description of the popular Rosina Vokes, she jumped up from the table to give as much as she remembered of "You should see me dance the polka!"—a poor imitation of one inimitable, but well meant.

Batey, without laying down his paper, turned his head to watch. Lydia, with her lips set to a smile, yet looked rather inscrutable. But it was a part of generosity with Grace to take for granted Lydia's pleasure in hearing about the good time. The contrast smote her, too, between the two pictures: Lydia

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and Batey spending the evening according to their dreary custom, she mending, he reading to himself, the heater not giving forth much heat or the economical lamp much light; and herself going to the theater in a hackney-coach with a young fellow lavish as new love, a fur robe for her knees, a bunch of violets for her hand, a box of caramels, the best seats in the house. It verily hurt her a little. But if she had felt a disposition to hide these things, lest they hurt her sister too, she would have hated herself for so insulting the latter in thought. She cherished the intention of moving Clare by a delicate hint to complete her pleasure next time by inviting the others to go with them.

"And afterwards?" asked Lydia. "Did he take you to supper?"

"We went to have some oysters."

This revelation, or something else, plunged Lydia in thought. She looked past Grace at the wall; and Grace, when the silence had lasted a minute or two, got the uncomfortable impression that Lydia had something on her mind which she was preparing to make known.

Lydia, however, first attended to other business.

"Batey, you ought to go and see to the furnace," she said.

Before leaving his chair, Batey took time to stretch his arms and legs. He then got up and obediently vanished.

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Grace folded her napkin, and was collecting her dishes to take them into the kitchen, when Lydia fulfilled her presentiment.

"Never mind those," she stopped her. "Sit down again; I want to talk to you."

Grace's wonder had a strong tincture of alarm. What followed dispelled the alarm without altogether clearing the wonder.

"How soon do you suppose you will be getting married?" Lydia asked.

"My dear," faltered Grace, "I 've only been engaged a little over two weeks."

"I know that. But have you any notion? Can you form any idea?"

"No, dear. We haven't spoken of it. Why do you want to know?"

"I want to know because your plans, unfortunately, affect ours."

"In what way do you mean, Lydia?"

"Use your brains. Is there any single, solitary way in which they do not?"

As Grace, trying to follow instructions and use her brains, was for some time mute, Lydia pursued: "We can't feel ourselves free, of course, until you marry."

"You mean that, if it were not for me, you would want to do something different—go somewhere else?"

"I mean that the lease here expires the first of May. I 've put off the landlord, and put him off, when he

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has wanted to know if we meant to keep on. We should certainly not renew the lease if you were going to be married, say, in six months."

"But that is not at all likely. A year is the soonest."

"Why on earth do you wait so long?" asked Lydia unexpectedly, and added, with a stinging laugh: "At the pace you are going, I should say the sooner the better."

Grace blushed darkly red, and for a moment sought words to express her with some adequacy without involving her in an instantaneous quarrel. While she was swallowing her annoyance, Lydia went on:

"This house is too big for us, anyhow. Too big, and for us at least—Batey and me—too expensive."

Grace still did not speak, waiting to be sure that her voice would be calm.

Lydia went on: "It has always seemed nonsense to me, anyhow—a whole house for such a small family. We could have boarded, any time, for much less."

"There are all the books. There is all the furniture. Papa liked the feeling of home."

"I know. That was the explanation he gave. And I always thought it a funny one, considering that he never would stay long enough in any place to have got the feeling that it was home."

"It was n't the love of change, Lydia. You know that."

"Do I? What was it then? Pure restlessness,

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that made him give up one job after another and move from city to city?"

"No, it was not restlessness," spoke Grace staunchly, and stiffened her voice to keep it from tears of indignation. "I understood perfectly. If you don't understand, I am not sure that I can make you. In every case there was a good reason, but not as everyone would see it. The methods, the policies, of the people he had to work with would always disgust him in the end. He could not adapt himself to being a party to what he regarded as humbug. He would try to change things and when he found he could n't, he would grow impatient and speak his mind, then get out of it—throw it over. You ought to be proud of it. I am. That he was valuable, that he was respected, was shown by magazines and newspapers, one after the other, offering him positions. In a world where so many people are careless about how they get success, if they just can get it, there ought to be a few who are particular. I am glad my father was one of them."

"You need n't get so hot, my dear, as if I had cast a slur on Papa's memory! I was only saying it had n't been very nice for us. You were always his favorite, though; you can't be expected to see the thing exactly as I do. I 'm not doing him an injustice, I hope you admit, in saying you were his favorite."

"Lydia, I loved Papa more than you did. That

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was the explanation. I love him more now than you do. It was that that made me his favorite. From a baby, I loved him more."

"And why, please, did you love him more? Because he loved you more, naturally. From the first. I was never spoiled and petted as you were. Papa and Mama were strict with me. I was only a little girl when you came—a little girl of nine; but I used to have to mind you like a little hired nursery-maid."

"Poor Mama was ill."

"No, she was n't. It was just their different way with me. I was expected to be unselfish and make myself useful. When your turn came, they let you be as selfish as you pleased; they never seemed to notice that you were selfish. I was always sacrificed to you, but no one ever seemed to notice it."

Grace stared at her sister with eyes of young bewilderment. She could not understand this unprovoked overflowing of venom, because she looked for some subtle reason for it. And it was so simple.

"Oh, Lydia, please not to go on like that!" she tried to end the horrid scene and with shuddering repugnance wipe away the stain of it. "It makes me sick to the soul; it makes me want to die and be out of it."

"My dear, a little truth won't do you a bit of harm!" said Lydia, in a voice as brisk and untender as the east wind. She looked elated, as if at a success. "You have always lived with your head in the clouds,

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so that you never see the things that have no direct reference to yourself. And now, more than ever, with your head filled by this new grandeur, it is easy for you to be wrapped in yourself. But there *are* other people, you know; there *are* other things. When I married Batey, it was in part to escape from a home where I was always made to play second fiddle."

"I was the baby, Lydia. They had lost two children between your coming and mine. Can't you understand? I was their last."

"Last but not least—yes. I remember my feelings of irony when, as soon as I was well out of the way, married off, you closed shop and all went to Europe for a holiday."

"Lydia, how can you pervert things so!"

"What am I perverting? Didn't you wait to go to Europe till I couldn't go?"

"But—but—Papa made you a present of money when you married, didn't he, which might be regarded as an equivalent for the traveling you missed?"

"Oh, *that!* It would have been rather too pointed if he hadn't given me anything. Don't look at me like that, Grace. I 'm not a curiosity. I could never see why one shouldn't tell the truth about people because they are dead. I call them well off when they are dead. It 's the time when they 're surest not to care."

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"It might be better to drop the subject," said Grace, so faintly as to give her words an effect of violence. "How ever did we come to it? How did this dreadful conversation begin? . . . You were saying you did n't want to renew the lease unless it were certain I should not be married inside the year. I shall not be. If it depends on that, you can renew it."

"How do you know, if the matter has never come up between you and Mr. Overcome?"

"However it turned out, I should pay my share of the rent. I will pay more than my half, to make up for any inconvenience there may be for others. Let me pay three quarters, Lydia—or let me pay the whole!"

"Go slow, my child. You have n't married your rich man yet."

"I have my share of Papa's life insurance."

"I don't want it. I have another reason for not caring to renew the lease. We might as well talk the thing out now. An opportunity has arisen for Batey which I don't think he ought to miss. It would involve our going South."

"Going South?"

"Yes; to Florida. It 's something that came up while you were away, and I 've wanted to give it a careful thinking over before saying anything about it. Batey's brother Foster, who has been in Welaka for some years, wants Batey to join him there and go

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in with him. There 's an opening, an excellent chance. Batey grew up in the South, you may remember, and has always wanted to go back. This climate is too harsh for him. The point now is to see what arrangement we can make about you. Your coming home engaged seemed at first to complicate things; but the more I 've looked at it, the more I 've seen that it really simplifies them."

"Oh, please don't think of me. You must n't let me make any difference. Please think only of yourselves."

"That 's easy to say, my dear. Don't be silly. I 've got to think of you and make some proper arrangement. What would your future family think? I can't leave unless you are suitably settled somewhere and everything is right for you till you get married. The best solution, of course, and the most natural, would be for you to spend the interval before your marriage with friends. Now, what friends have you who could and would take you in?"

"I can't think of any, Lydia, that I would care to ask for so great an accommodation, such a very great favor. We have n't a single relative in this city, or a single friend that we 've had for any length of time. How should we have? We have n't lived here long enough."

"We 've never lived anywhere long enough to have friends—it 's what I was saying when you picked me up and seemed to think I was such a monster."

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"Ida Lamont is the only person in the world I would think of asking so much of. And she lives 'way off in Maine."

"Well, then—"

"But there are boarding-houses. I suppose people are sometimes married from a boarding-house."

"You would have a church wedding; the boarding-house need n't appear in the matter at all. There are perfectly respectable boarding-houses, of course, even elegant ones. If we make a business of looking them up, I have no doubt we can find one kept by a lady with daughters, who would take you right into her own family. Or—this would be even better—we can look for a family, not a boarding-house at all, a family who would make you like one of themselves."

"Give me a little time to think, Lydia. Don't do anything about it for a day or two."

"We shall have to be out of this house before the first of May, you realize."

"I know. Go about the part that concerns you and Batey as if I were not here. Only let me think out for myself the part that concerns solely me. Give me a little time."

"Very well. You go ahead, and we 'll go ahead. If we could get away even earlier—say, by the middle of April—it would be that much better for Batey and me. This is a turn in our lives when no one can blame us, I should think, for looking out for our-

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selves. *We* are n't going to marry a rich man, you see. As for being beholden to rich relations, I shall be excused, I hope, for saying that it 's not to my taste."

"I have n't said that I 'm glad of this new opening for Batey. But I am, I hope you know—with all my heart. I would n't for anything in the world be a hindrance in the way of it."

"No. With all the magnificence that is coming to you in a few months,—for if, when he asks you to set the day, Clarence Overcome lets you put it a whole year ahead, he 's not the man I take him for,—if, I say, with all the wealth and grandeur that 's coming to you so soon, you grudged Batey and me our poor little prospects, you 'd have to be meaner than I 've ever thought you."

"I want you—I want you so much to succeed. This will be the very thing for Batey, I am sure."

"It does look more promising than usual, because my half of the life insurance gives us a little capital to start with. It would be no use trying, Foster says, without some capital. For once in our lives, we have it. It 's not much, but it 's something. That 's one reason why it 's so important not to wait till the current expenses of this house have eaten it up."

"You 're quite right. Yes, I 'm sure you will do well this time. There always comes a turn, does n't there, if one waits long enough."

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"It was about time, I should say, that something fortunate happened to us. I was coming to the conclusion that there was n't an atom of justice in the world."

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CHAPTER V

GRACE went to her room in a daze. She would have liked to go out and walk, but it was raining too heavily. She could reflect while walking in the open air better than in any other way; her puny bits of poetry had in their time been composed on her long walks.

In the afternoon the sky partly cleared, and she started forth, with rubbers and umbrella, not quite trusting the season and its moods. She passed in the upper hall, with a pang, a roll of carpeting, already pulled up by zealous hands, the beginning of the disruption of the last home that had known her father. She decided that the hour called for calm reasonableness, helpful philosophy.

She soon reached the street she had been aiming for, where there were never many people—the long street of elegant habitations among which stood her own that was to be. This led to a suburb; then, after miles, to a wooded hill and a lake inclosed by stone banks for city drinking. As she walked, Grace was not only trying to think things out and come to some definiteness about her best course: she was also combating the soul-sickness born of Lydia's holding up

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the sacred past in so hateful a light; she was struggling to subdue the burning in her breast of wrath and indignation.

That there was Clare in the world—that she was happy in his love, and wore in token of it, pinned to the front of her coat, violets whose odor was counted upon to keep her in mind of it all day long—did not make any difference in the hurt of having Lydia think of her and the rest as she had shown that she did. The most horrible fact was to know that Lydia carried all that sense of injury within her, even when things ran smoothly and she remained silent; the most amazing was to think that Lydia was sincere in all that she said about her father and mother and sister. Lydia felt that she was right, even as Grace knew that she was wrong. It was enough to drive one quite mad. . . . With eyes sliding inattentively over the bricks of the sidewalk, Grace tramped quickly along, goaded by those thoughts which are enough to drive one mad.

She did not believe herself as selfish as Lydia said, but she knew she was often forgetful, absorbed in whatever at the moment interested her. She was caught in this and brought to a sense of sin too often not to feel humble. Yet, knowing just how it happened and how compatible it was with a strong desire to be nice to everybody, particularly to Lydia, she could not feel it to be unpardonable or heinous. Now, while walking in meditation, she was forced to recog-

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nize that she, too, had dreadful thoughts about Lydia sometimes—she had them at this moment—thoughts as cruel as Lydia's about her. Only she never said them. She would have been afraid to say them, with the stronger woman sure to turn upon her and say worse.

But that was not the whole truth. She could not have wished to wound as much as the publishing of her inedited thoughts in moments of grievance and excitement would have wounded. Her cowardice was not greater than her charity. Moreover, she retained, however angry, the understanding that it would be wronging herself and the other to let thoughts and words represent her that had no place in her calmer hours. Between thinking and uttering her thoughts there was a margin where the precepts for right conduct dwelt, whose voice she could still hear above passion; and these precepts established that to create a piece of ugliness, such as a wrangle, was a thing which, while one retained the control of oneself and the dream of a serene and seemly world, one did not consent to do.

Lydia—who spoke her mind, she!—had simpler mental motions. She never examined their origin. Why should she, with the inborn, lifelong, and flawless conviction of her own right-mindedness?

"In such a little while, less than a month," Grace reflected at last, "Lydia will be going far away; and when I am not there to irritate her, time will soften

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everything in her memory. And I shall remember how she altered my dresses for me, and ironed my handkerchiefs, and let me sleep in the morning, and a thousand other sisterly things, and the picture of this day will fade."

In less than a month! With what confusing rapidity things had been happening to her. It made one dizzy. Hurling her clothes into a trunk for the West Indies, becoming engaged, and now the whole background of her life crumbling to make room for things still unimagined! . . . . For what things?

That was now the question: where to go, how to live, after the Poors left? The boarding-house was the last choice, the no-choice. If only Ida Lamont had been near, who would so surely have given her hospitality! . . . A minute search among her acquaintances—they were not numerous—had no more result than her first brief review of them: not any of them were sufficiently close friends to ask a favor of.

Her thought stopped on Andreas Dane. Had not one of the girls at the art school told her that his mother let rooms? With quickened interest she followed this thread, and passed, exploring, through a picture-world of her creation. His mother would be sure to be motherly; his home would have the requisites that were her requisites, too. But no, it would not do. There were reasons why it would not do. A pity, for it might have filled her need.

Though she could get Lydia's point of view and

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find Lydia's action natural, it was bitter to be moved just now from the decencies of her home to the unpicturesque promiscuousness of a boarding-house. Clare had known her such a little while; his family and friends did not know her at all in her true setting, and now would never do so. Her home was not that of money-rich people, but it was something much better in being that of nice people, with ancestors and traditions and education and old furniture. She was proud of being her father's daughter; their house, in a manner, stood for him. Clare, in coming to see her there, was not stooping. A sensitive nerve in her winced at the picture of him calling on her in a boarding-house, with its hodge-podge of properties, its odor of meals, its prying and gossiping fellow boarders. She had no experience of boarding-houses, and carried in her mind a distasteful caricature of them. A tortured self-love filled her in anticipation with the burning of a permanent blush.

With this trial ahead to meet unaided, already she felt lonely—and rather appalled; because never had she been without someone to take care of her. She did not know what it was to take care of herself, even for a day. During all her childhood there had been near her that dear mother to whom she still jealously apportioned half of her filial affection, though the father who had had so much larger a share in her life, after she began to think, had become the closer comrade, the dominant influence. After her mother's

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death her father had been there; he had not sent her away to school or college, but had kept her with him for the comfort of both. Finally, and up to this day, there had been Lydia to direct and scold her, but likewise to stand, with her longer knowledge of life, between her and the difficult world. There are so many things a girl cannot know. A girl is timid about so many things. And now, ignorant, unpractised, she was to decide everything, be responsible for everything, herself.

She had Clare, of course. But something warned her that this was different: it was not such wisdom as his that a young girl needed to walk by.

"It is time to be brave," Grace thought, because she felt so much fear in looking ahead at those days after the familiar surroundings had vanished and the familiar folks had fled. Her father had said that you might have all the virtues except courage and the moment might come when all your virtues would be made void for lack of that one. He had tried to implant courage in her, knowing she was deficient in it. She held courage now as an ideal he had given to her, and aspired toward it when she felt her nerve failing.

"It is time to be brave," she said.

Sudden and unlooked-for came the need to spread her umbrella. At the same time she turned and, beneath the pattering tent, went back over the same road, with the pain she had come out to walk off a

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good deal deadened. A star shone through the melting tempest, of whose shining behind the clouds she had not at any moment lost consciousness. Clare was coming to take her to a concert that evening.

She decided not to say a word of the change in prospect. She shrank from talking about it with him just yet, lest some remark of his draw forth awkward admissions from her—lest, in brief, being prejudiced in her favor, he should fail to get the Poors' point of view and be disposed to criticize them, in his frank way. He was not much taken with Lydia and Batey, she feared—at which she genuinely wondered, because when the Poors went with her to the family dinner at the Overcomes' they both made such a fine appearance. Batey was distingushed, if nothing else, and Lydia, in her severe way, had looked on that occasion so handsome.

She would not say a word about the new plans that evening, but after coming in she would write. Her mind was clearest late at night, when all the world was still; she was least sleepy then. She would explain everything, and so present it to Clare in that letter that he would see all in the right light, and not blame her people any more than she blamed them when she was regarding them—as she hoped to do, in time, altogether—calmly and unselfishly.

She let herself in with a latch-key, and was placing her umbrella in the stand when she perceived in it a

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wet umbrella strange to her: a handsome umbrella with a solid silver knob, an elegant yet sensible umbrella, large for a woman, though small for a man. Whose?

The owner was in the drawing-room, talking with Lydia. Grace could hear them, but not what they said. Nor could she guess whose voice it was.

She was starting up the stairs, when Lydia came to the door and called:

"Come in, Grace. Mrs. Vawter is here."

Mrs. Vawter. Of course. Clare's sister Theresa.

Grace hurried in to see her, with the abundant joyfulness that attends any boon after a lonely bout with sorrow. Theresa had from the first minute been so warmly welcoming. She was the one who had made herself the representative of the family to Clarence's betrothed.

She was a fine-looking woman of forty-five, with an attractive air of physical soundness, not a thread of gray in her black hair, nor any diminution of liveliness in her black eye. Her smile was immensely cheering, and was used to cheer you all the while she talked in her vivacious, hearty way. She could admit that the world was a vale of tears; she had not an excuse to make for it, on the contrary; but she induced you, while with her, to do as she did, and get some good in spite of it.

She arose to kiss Grace, and—

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"What is this I hear?" she began at once, breezily. "Your sister tells me that she is leaving, and that you are thinking of going somewhere to board. My dear child, how could such an idea enter your little head or your sister's? You are going to do nothing of the kind. You are coming right to your rightful family. Do you think Red would hear of anything else?"

"Red?"

"My brother, whom in your quaint little way you call Clare. Our house is big,—you saw it,—and it is elastic. We have plenty of room. When necessary, the girls double up. Think how we should feel, child, to have you go to anybody else!"

Grace, a little dazed again, smiled foolishly, without stirring. Her eyes moved from Theresa to Lydia. She saw from Lydia's face that all had been settled between them before she came in. The smile began to tremble on her lips; a quick moisture gathered in her eyes. So the terrors besieging her had been ghosts. That burden of trouble, so real to her, had been of a kind to drop and be lost in the sea at the end of an hour. How phantasmagorical is this world.

Theresa, seeing her tears, so easy to interpret, took her comfortingly in her arms.

"I think I see her, Red's dainty little sweetheart, in a stuffy old boarding-house!" she petted her.

Grace returned her kiss affectionately, and let her

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head lie on the other's shoulder; through the whisper of silk she could hear, deep down, Theresa's muffled heart-beats. . . .

She felt, of a sudden, that she must free herself or smother. She was frightened.

In the midst of her self-abandonment to relief and gratitude, she was frightened. Things were going too fast, her destiny was moving too fast, by too great leaps. It did not give her time to breathe, to think, to see her way. . . .

Nothing nicer could have happened than this, obviously—that the Overcomes should take her to live with them until her marriage; yet her fright came in part from the recognition that, between Theresa's amiability and her own, she could not help herself. She was as much bound to go as if she had been delivered over by Lydia, with hands and feet tied.

This condition lasted but a second.

"No," she mentally talked back to her bad sensations; "I am free. Of course I am free; and there is nothing I had rather do than go to stay with Clare's people."

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CHAPTER VI

WHEN it came to a division of the things that had belonged to them in common, it was decided that, as Grace would be so well provided for, Lydia should take very nearly the whole of the furniture for her home down South. Grace should have the books, all of them, and Lydia most of the silver; Grace her father's writing-desk, Lydia her mother's India shawl.

The books had been packed in many boxes, and carted, on Clarence's suggestion, to his new house, along with the worn old mahogany desk. Furniture and crockery and household stuff of every sort had been crated and burlaped and barreled, conveyed and piled into a roomy freight-car. And the house stood empty.

When there was nothing more to do in preparation for leaving, Grace went slowly from floor to floor, in a little sentimental journey of last farewells. She had been at times so busy, and at other times so tired, during the great dismantling, that she had seemed to herself surprisingly dead with regard to it all. Now she tried to penetrate herself with feelings appropriate to the hour, go piously over the memories at-

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tached to each room, imprint on her mind the bare wall-papers and floors, last aspect of the friendly, sheltering house so soon to become a stranger.

In the space that had been Lydia's bedroom, she found her sister, sitting on a trunk. Batey and she were going to a hotel for the last night, before starting on their journey. Grace was going on that same afternoon to the Overcomes'. The Poors had refused the Overcome invitation to dinner that evening—the reality beneath their excuse being Lydia's idiosyncratic desire to dine alone with her husband, at a hotel, and be reminded of their honeymoon!

The baggage was ready; Batey had gone out to order a carriage.

Lydia had already put her hat on. Grace looked at her with much the same sorrowful tenderness as she had been spending on the things that she should see no more. She said to herself, however, to keep from tears, that in the case of Lydia it would only be a question of a year or two.

In the weeks just past Grace had largely lost remembrance of Lydia's brutally frank speaking and unfair interpretations. Lydia, in her own way, had been the good sister, saving the younger fatigue and trouble, taking thought for her, as a matter of course. But there was more than that to endear Lydia at this moment—Batey, too: the prospect of a change, new faces and pastures new, the hope of better fortune, the exhilaration of a little power in hand, in the form of

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money, lighted the faces of both in a manner that made them touching—to Grace, at least, whose spirit had so often been weighed down by the misfortunes and dejection of her relatives.

She seated herself on the trunk beside Lydia. For a few minutes they remained silent, thinking, Grace supposed, the same thoughts. In this supposition, she pushed her hand into Lydia's, to show that she understood, and to comfort her.

Lydia returned the pressure, and said, with an effect of sudden resolve:

"Grace, there is something I have been wanting to ask you. And I haven't done it, for fear you would misunderstand."

"Misunderstand, Lydia? How could you think such a thing—if by misunderstanding you mean misjudging your motives? What is it?"

"It's this, Grace. In a few months you will be a married woman, wife of a rich man, and have everything heart could desire. The little bit of money you have in your own right you won't need."

"You mean Papa's life insurance?"

"Yes. It would merely lie in the bank, bringing you a tiny interest, if it brought you any at all. Whereas, if you lent it to Batey and me, we should be glad to give you good interest for it. Of course, any time you wanted it back we should manage somehow to pull it out of the business and let you have it. We should give you as security a claim on all we

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own. There is the furniture and the silver—everything."

Grace was silent, taken aback.

Lydia went on: "Of course, if you don't want to, you don't have to, and you won't. Only, I was thinking: the little bit more would make a big difference to us, and I don't see what difference it could make to you."

"Wait, Lydia. Give me a moment to think. How can I make up my mind so quickly?"

"Take your time, of course. I don't want to urge you, anyhow. Nor do I want to ask it as a particular favor. You would have the interest, you would have the security; it 's a business transaction, like any other. My being your sister need n't influence you."

"Wait a minute, Lydia; let me think."

"You would keep enough out of it, of course, to get your wedding outfit and give you spending money until you marry. A thousand dollars ought to do it handsomely, because you won't need furs or laces or jewelry: all those things will be showered on you. Think of the size of that family, and their wealth, and then think of the wedding presents you are likely to receive."

"But just because Clare is so rich, Lydia, don't you see, I should like to come to him not quite like a beggar."

"Does he know you have anything? Have you told him about the life insurance?"

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"No. We 've never spoken of money together."

"If you think, my dear, that a paltry five thousand dollars would make the slightest difference to Clarence Overcome— You must know that that ring on your finger can't be worth much less. Later in life, when you 've been married for some time, you 'll be much more likely to be glad of a little money in your private exchequer—to pay a dressmaker's bill, perhaps, that 's grown so big you 're afraid of a scolding even from the fondest of husbands. If you have the money now—I know you, my child—it will melt through your fingers to the last penny, for nothing. If you do us this good turn, you will really be doing yourself a far better one."

Grace sat looking down, thinking it over, with a shadow on her face. She wanted so much to keep her money, the first she had ever possessed, and by means of it to appear well among the Overcomes. The pleasure of having money of her own was new: Lydia had turned it over to her only a day or two before.

She remembered an episode in the life of a queen of France who, when she crossed the border of her husband's country, the land over which she was to reign, changed all the clothes on her body for other clothes, of his giving. One who loved her as much as Clare did would be glad to take her like that, with nothing of her own, and to give her everything. Clare so loved to give her things! And the prospect of utter dependence on him had its special quality of

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sweetness. But yet, she would have liked to hold on to her pennies, and be generous with them in her turn. But yet again, she had Clare's love—what did she need more? And poor Lydia had nothing but this new chance, of which she was rightly anxious to make the most. Lydia loved Batey—strange as it seemed—just as she loved Clare. This additional money would perhaps add to the chance of Batey's success.

Grace turned to look at Lydia. It was Lydia who now was looking down, thinking it over, with a shadow on her face, a bitter twist to her mouth. She was thinking, Grace felt it, how selfish her sister was—how selfish she had always been.

Grace wanted to say, "If I give you this money, which I want so much to keep, will you promise to wipe out all that old thinking of me as selfish? Will you recognize in it a sign that I love you, and want to be sisterly, and want you to succeed and be happy, and love me too?"

But those were things she could not say to Lydia—though, when at Grace's clearing her voice to speak Lydia looked up, they were plainly to be read in her shiny young eyes.

"All right, dear," she said; "you can have it. What must I do? Write you a check?"

Lydia was moved. With an impulse of sincere affection, she clasped the little sister's neck and kissed her hard. When they drew apart, each saw, with trembling smiles, tears in the other's eyes.

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CHAPTER VII

THE house of the Overcomes stood at the corner of a block, where the broad street, one of the city's main arteries, grew quieter as it neared the suburbs, and—taking time to breathe, as it were, and remember its youth—leaved forth here and there in a green square, a little park, with a fountain and garden-seats under the trees. The house, a handsome structure of brownstone and brick, five stories high counting basement and mansard, rose on its own ample lot, inclosed by a wall of brick and brownstone topped by an iron railing.

A house built by individuals to meet individual requirements, and not by a company, for rent. It expressed, if one chose, power and pride; it had the air somewhat of a stronghold, and could, in fact, become a species of castle with drawbridge updrawn, if one closed the iron gate made to span the interruption in the wall at the foot of the front stoop. This gate, however, stood continually open, and any passer with curiosity enough and little enough fear could have entered, passed along the side of the house, and seen all that the wall hid: a wide rectangular lawn with one spreading tree, encircled at the foot by a

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rustic seat; and, at the farther end of the green, constituting the back wall, a low building with closed wooden shutters—a warehouse, possibly.

Grace, arriving late, was given but a minute before being escorted to the dinner-table. Clare met her at the stairs.

"Welcome, O Beauty, to the house of your Beast!" he said, and drew her hand through his arm.

Mrs. Vawter sat at one end of the board, in what was the chief seat, by token of the carving knife and fork laid before it. She placed Grace at her right, between herself and Clarence.

"You know them all," she indicated the rest of the family; "but there are so many of us, you can't be expected to disentangle us and our relationships so early in the day. Now, listen. From left to right. This is Sim, or Simeon, my husband. That is Fanny, more often called Pinky—mine, and I am proud of it. Next to her is Dolores, my sister-in-law. She and all that end of the table are Overcomes. (Whatever in this house isn't Vawter is Overcome.) Uncle Sylvanus, my uncle and the young ones' great-uncle; Rebecca, Black's daughter; Black himself, head of the house, but leaving me, as you see, to do the carving. Alec, his son, and Junior, another son of his. Then, next to Red, another chick of mine, Seetah, short for Teresita, 'little Theresa'—we 're both Theresa, you see. And there you are."

Grace refrained from asking about the little girl

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sitting at a small table alone, lest the explanation of her exile involve some disgrace. She had not seen this member of the family before.

Theresa remembered her after a moment.

"And that is Mabel," she said—"My youngest except Bobby, who is away at school."

"Zip, how are you getting along?" Clare asked over his shoulder.

"You 'll have to give me something for this, Uncle Red!" said the little girl at the separate table, in the manner of a spoiled child. She looked toward him with an air of injury.

"If you don't behave yourself I 'll give you something!" Clare promised, with grim jocularity.

"You 'll have to give me some new roller-skates, or else a new croquet set," proceeded the little girl, unalarmed. "I tell you, Uncle Red, I mean it. If you don't, you 'll see. I—I 'll—"

"I 'll hang you up by the heels, young lady, if you are n't careful."

"You 'd better promise, Uncle Red. I 'm not afraid of you, and you know it."

"Can't you guess"—Clare turned to Grace—"why the sweet and winsome Mabel sits over there? It 's because she does n't know how to feed herself; she lets the gravy run down on her bib."

"No, it 's not!" cried Mabel. "It 's because there 'd be thirteen at the table. There! Now, Uncle Red, how do you like it?"

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He laughed out gaily. "The tension is lessened! And I 'm in a croquet set. Got the better of you that time, you little blackmailer, did n't I?"

"Blackmailer yourself!" shouted Zip. "You 're a mean, mean, mean, dirty—"

"My child, my child!" Theresa hushed her, without ceasing to laugh. "What do you suppose Miss Ingalis will think?"

"Miss Ingalis understands," Grace turned soothingly toward the child,—"and thinks there is much to say on your side. It is I, who have driven you out of your place at the table, who ought to make it right with you. Which do you want most, dear, the croquet or the skates?"

Zip stared at her, as if plumbing her soul. "I don't want either," she said after a moment, and attended in silence to her food.

"I hope you 're superstitious too," said Theresa, "but, if you are n't you must n't think we 're all of us afraid of being thirteen at table. Dolores is the only one who really cares. Are n't you, Dolores? Dolores does n't mind being called superstitious."

Grace looked across the table at the one in question, who was quietly eating, with her eyes on her plate, and not saying anything for herself in reply to the charge of superstition. Grace took her to be of a different race—Spanish, perhaps, like her name. She had prematurely white hair—striking, with her black eyes. Her face was deeply lined in forms suggestive

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of old griefs; the pouches under her eyes might be imagined to have been enlarged by containing tears. The broad, lowered eyelids gave to her face at that moment unusual dignity; the silver crucifix on her breast helped further to make her interesting to Grace. It was difficult to tell why Dolores looked of minor importance among the rest, for all the air of aristocracy which she alone wore. A matter of personal caliber, perhaps. She had domesticated tragedy and made sorrow tame. Grace felt much sympathy for her, a widow, a Catholic among Protestants. She said, speaking toward her:

"I am superstitious, too. I don't want to be thirteen at table, either. Because"— she justified her attitude—"you can't sit down thirteen at table and not be thinking of it, more or less, and I don't want to think of death at dinner. But it 's a shame the littlest one should pay for everybody. I 'll take turns with you, Mable. I 'll sit at the little table next time—your Uncle Red with me. Is it all right, Clare?"

"Your ideas are inspirations, O princess of romance!"

"Why"— Grace turned to Theresa—"why is it you call him Red?"

"For the best reason possible. It 's his name."

"His name?"

"His middle name, or the first syllable of it."

"Oh! I thought his middle name was Robert.

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Mrs. Lamont was under the impression that his middle initial stood for Robert."

"No; it stands for Redivivus. Clarence Redivivus Overcome. Mother had her way about calling him Clarence—a name she just had a fancy for; there was never anyone belonging to her or to father called Clarence. Then father, suspecting it was his last chance to name any son of his, said if he let her have Clarence she must let him have Redivivus, which he had been trying in vain to fasten on to the boys, one after the other, as they came. I 've heard the name till I don't know what it sounds like; I guess it 's funny, the first time. But the short for it is all right. Red 's a good name. Our mother died not long after Red's birth, so he has never been called Clarence in the family. Father thought it sissified."

"Red and Black," said Grace, without comment, and turned her face, with a smile that sought favor, toward the head of the house, where he sat, rather grand in her eyes, and a shade formidable. He responded by as much of a smile as a gray business man need give to a little girl, but left it to Theresa to go on with the talking.

"Oh, Black is a family name," the latter willingly continued. "Father's name was Jesse, so mother always called this Jesse—Black's first name is Jesse—Jesse Black, to distinguish them; then it got to be just Black. Red and Black. It 's a happen."

"Black Overcome. Red Overcome." Rebecca,

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Black's low-browed daughter, spoke the names thoughtfully, as if holding them up to inspection for a fresh point of view. "They sound like robber chiefs."

Grace, turning in the direction of the one who spoke, was amused by the bold fancy that she looked for all the world like a robber chief's daughter of the days when such folk were romantic. She was remarkably well developed at twenty, with brows and eyes so dark they lowered like a storm-cloud, and lips trenchantly crimson over teeth that appeared sharp, the canines being pointed. Her hair lay in loose black rings all over her head, smothering her forehead. She should have had, to complete her, gold hoops in her ears and a knife in her garter, Grace thought.

She put admiration into her smile as she turned it upon this future sister—no, niece. Though Rebecca's eyes met Grace's, they did not seem to see it. She looked fixedly back for a few seconds, then took her glance away, without acknowledging the smile. Those lustrous orbs must be short-sighted, as fine eyes so often are: thus Grace excused her.

"And why"— she turned to Clare—"why was your father bent upon calling you Redivivus? Such a singular name!"

"Oh, that—that 's part of the family history. It 's Theresa speaks that piece. Come on, Theresa, with the family history."

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A dramatic groan rose from Junior, another from Alec, a copy of them from Seetah, who appeared to faint on her chair; last and more of it, the same pert comedy from Zip.

Theresa waved her hand toward them all with unbroken good humor.

"You don't have to listen. Talk among yourselves, eat your victuals. Miss Ingalis is one of the family now, and will be interested, or if she is n't she 'll pretend to be. Miss Ingalis is n't like you. Miss Ingalis is a lady. You know Latin, I guess, Grace. Then you know what Redivivus means. Well, when the fortunes of the family, which were at a pretty low ebb, had begun to redivive, or revive, father wanted to record it in the name of one of his children. It 's the sort of thing they did in Bible days. He was a good deal of a Bible reader."

"I see!" Grace offered, in her face and manner, the flattery of a perfect attention. "Do tell me the rest of it—the whole of it. Of course I want to hear."

"Well, then, to go back to the beginning, as far as we know it—the family name was Ruggles. Yes, Ruggles; no Overcome about it. Till one of them was named Thomas Overcome Ruggles, just as Red was called Redivivus, a name with an idea in it. They were merchants, and not doing well, and needed to overcome a good many difficulties, you see, to get themselves up again to the level where they had used

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to be. That one, Thomas Overcome Ruggles, when he had made up his mind he could n't do it at home, came to this country, about a hundred and fifty years ago, and on coming here dropped his last name, just for luck.

"That was the first Overcome. But he did n't do well, in spite of the change, and died a disappointed man. Next we know of, his grandson, who was our grandfather, came with his wife and young children to settle in a place called Woodbury, a village in a farming district only about thirty miles from here. I don't suppose you 've ever heard of it. He got a house, and built a barn, and planted his land. He was a hard-working, strong-headed fellow, they say, and ought to have got on. Instead of which, what do you suppose? His barn caught fire one night, and set fire to the house, and both burned to the ground with everything in them except the human beings. Does n't it look like bad luck? Can you blame him? When his wife died of her burns, he went out into the wood-lot and hanged himself, leaving those four young ones without a soul to take care of them, or anything to do with."

In spite of their affectation of disdain, most of the family were listening; Dolores perhaps not, and Alec flagrantly not. But Sylvanus followed the story of which he had been a part with a wistful expression on his wrinkled brown face which, had a lace cap hidden his hair, might have been taken for that of

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an old woman as well, exactly, as that of an old man. And Black listened with an expression that Grace came to know later as habitual—an effect of smiling with solidly closed jaws, when he was in reality not smiling at all.

"The eldest of the children was ten years old—that was father," Theresa continued. "The youngest was one; that was Uncle Sylvanus. There were Aunt Marinda and Uncle William in between. The community did n't know just what to do with them, so they divided them up; each child was taken to live in a different family. Now, will you believe it, father, that little shaver, made up his mind to get that family of his together again? He has told me about it many a time. He was put to work on a farm, where he got up at four, and milked and hoed and weeded like any grown man. When he was fifteen he came to this city with just two dollars in his pocket. He went to work in a dry-goods store. Grit did it, and afterwards luck. At thirty he had his own store. He had married mother, and they set up housekeeping in a house near the docks. We were all born there except Julia and Red. By that time we had moved to a big house out of town, with grounds around it. Mother wanted to go where it was quiet and she could have a garden. But father liked the city better, near his business, and some years after her death sold the other house and bought this.

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"And here old man Overcome got his dream: the family around him, his sister Marinda and his brother Sylvanus included. The other one, Uncle William, settled out West, where, with some help from father at the start, he has done almost as well. This house was father's pride. The feeling that he 'd done what he set out to do, that he 'd raised the family again to the place it used to have, gave father a kind of pride which it seems to me he had a right to.

"He was a fine man, Grace. How he hated to have us quarrel! How he wanted us to keep together and carry on the business he 'd built up! He cared for it in the future as much as if he 'd been going to be there to see it. In the same way he cared about this house. He wanted it to remain the home of the Overcomes; so he fixed it, as he did the business, in such a way that not one of us can do anything without all the rest agreeing. We 've got to live united."

"And you 'll see how remarkably we do it"—Clare, judging there had been enough of family chronicles, made interruption. "Don't be scared, Grace, if you hear scuffling and cries of 'Help! Murder!' It 's only our gentle fun."

"Don't listen to him, Grace. What he means, I suppose, is that he and Alec are great boxers, and have impromptu matches now and then without the formalities or the gloves."

"You need n't fear I shall take seriously all that

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Clare says," Grace smiled at the sister from a sweetheart's vast knowledge. "If I did, I should believe some strange things!"

She glanced archly at Clare, who looked back into her eyes with such warmth that, remembering the propriety of not making love in the presence of others, she turned to her neighbor beyond Clare—Sita, who was leaning forward with the unconcealed object of watching her. By way of engaging conversation, she asked whether Sita had been glad to leave school, or had left it with regret.

Sita, nineteen, had regarded herself as a full-fledged young lady now for one year, since she dropped learning for dressing and dancing and reading love-stories. There was something more unformed about Sita than is usual with girls at nineteen. "Sita spills over," the family said. Her full eyes and lips, soft and moist, indicated the propensity to easy excesses and reactions. That she was breathlessly interested in Miss Ingalis was so apparent that Grace felt it the duty of an older woman to reward her, and devoted herself affably to a little intercourse across Clare's broad chest.

When she thought she had sufficiently been gracious, she tapered off, to give more of her mind to Clare's talk with his brother-in-law. It was nothing she knew about: some measure in city politics. It was time she began to try to understand these manly things.

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Black, from the far end of the table, joined in; and then Alec. It was when Alec's remarks came out so high-colored as to catch attention that she realized more definitely that Clare's nephew resembled him as much as a brother. They were nearer in age than Clare and Black, youngest and eldest of a long family. But how were Clare's harmonious good looks spoiled, to what an extent was his charm lost, in Alec, with his keener, more irregular features and rougher hair! Alec's nose and chin were aggressive, where Clare's were intrepid, alert; his face was common red, where Clare's was suffused by a soft glow. Alec's eyes were the same fiery blue, but one of them confessed a slight cast; and his eyebrows, if he scowled, produced the effect of a dog's snarl. Clare's brows were Olympian in their authority and calm. Alec had not Clare's great strength, either—Grace was sure of it. Black might have been as strong once upon a time, but he could not be so now. The strongest as well as handsomest of those strong, vivid Overcomes was hers, fortunate girl.

She hoped she should get on well with Alec and Black; with Junior, too. The latter was more the same kind of person as Sita—a little uncouth, clumsy, the least attractive of the younger people, in her opinion. But she meant to like him. She meant to like them all, and make them like her. "Thy people shall be my people—" What other people had she now but these? Her blood kindred, scattered and

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far, were very shadowy to her. Lydia, on the day to follow, would be receding, receding with Batey into unknown places, out of calculation. Here was her world.

She had the impression all through dinner of being watched. She would catch now one glance, now another, bent upon her with a perceptible fixity of interest. They were taking her measure, too, very naturally. It was vain to hope they would be as well pleased with her as she was with them. Diverse as they were among themselves, and different from her, she included them all in one approval. The qualities of the more striking among them so filled the eye that she could not perceive as yet that not all possessed those qualities. To each she attributed some share of Clare's splendor of being, with independence, self-assurance, personal power: things that won her as nothing of hers could win them, unless—she hoped, with time given—her effort to please.

She respected their frank enjoyment of riches, as well as their frank avowal of the pauperism from which they had risen. She relished their simple satisfaction with themselves, their freedom from pretense. If they lacked something of culture, they lacked nothing of intelligence. She trod down narrownesses and shynesses and sensitivenesses of her own like unworthy weeds, to rejoice in their breadth of nature, their sturdy carelessness of criticism. Parts of Shakespeare plays where the language is

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gross but pertinent and felicitous had given her pleasure of the same kind as their pithy, inedited conversation.

The largeness of light reflected on those spacious walls, after her dim dining-room at home; the beautiful flowers in extravagant abundance on the table; the luxury of the meal; the shine of silver and crystal and damask; the excitement of the many people and the new life, had undoubtedly gone a little to Grace's head. She was intoxicated, taken out of herself, like a grub just sprung from its cocoon into the world of butterflies, when that evening with an infinity of good will she opened her arms in readiness to take to her breast all of her lover's family as one.

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CHAPTER VIII

AN unusual feature of the Overcome mansion was the rotunda—so called for want of a more exact word: an oval of stately dimensions, a story and a half high, in the center of the building. A gallery surrounded it at a third of its height, on to which opened a dozen wide and decorative doors. Before the door that belonged to the dining-room, and that was the central door at the back, a flight of stairs, also wide and decorative, dropped from the gallery into what might be called the pit. The latter was rather dark by day, receiving its light chiefly from two garden doors at the end of the crypt-like space beneath the dining-room, and for that reason was little used until night, when clusters of globes at the top of carved and gilded posts—part of the gallery railing—became large and luminous pearls. Then the rotunda, on the commonest evening, assumed a festal look.

When, after dinner, Grace stood on the gallery with Clare, she asked whether this unusual architecture had been his father's idea.

"No; we found it as it is," he answered. "This house was built fifty or sixty years ago by a doctor—a nerve specialist, he seems to have been—for a private

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hospital. Pretty high-class patients, it looks like."

They went down the stairs to the polished floor. A piano stood under the gallery, in the part that Grace thought of afterward as the crypt. Rebecca had opened it, and was thumping out a gay tune, by ear, with a good deal of knack. Clare bent toward an open door, lighted within, and shining darkly red from the color of the stuffs in the room beyond. Several steps led from the oval pit into this, which was low-ceiled, smoky, semi-subterranean, and called the den, sacred to the men-folk of the house. In this sanctuary they might smoke, play billiards, box, fight, read newspapers, and, if they so pleased to do, place their feet on the mantel-piece.

Black and his sons were there when Grace and Clare looked in. Alec promptly challenged his uncle to a game of pool, and Grace pressed Clare to remain. To make herself beloved by not disturbing family habitudes, she ran from him and up the stairs.

There were things of which Theresa and she could talk much better if Clare were not present. Theresa had promised to show her pictures of Clare when he was a little boy.

Grace found her by the parlor lamp, with a bit of pick-up work in her hands which did not require eyesight or attention. Fanny sat near the same table, with a more ambitious piece. "Pinky is a Vawter," the family was wont to say; and, though Grace could not so soon gather all the fitness of this classifica-

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tion, she could see that, more than any of the rest excepting her father, she appeared uninterested in the people and things around her. Rather dry and set, she was; not very pretty, with her sandy hair and whitish eyelashes and features a trifle dull, which a beautiful complexion, the tint of a pink pearl, was not quite enough to redeem. But she did not by far look a nonentity: one could imagine her as much to be counted with, in her way, as those of the family whose exuberance of vitality made Grace feel herself poor in spirit and pale of blood.

Grace gave a few minutes to the assiduous contemplation of Fanny's fingers at their embroidery; then, by the simple ruse of simulating enthusiasm for this handiwork, she snared the girl into talking. The performance was mechanical on both sides, but successful to the extent of leaving the impression that Grace wished to be friendly, and that Fanny was not altogether shut to tenders of friendship.

At her mother's request, Fanny went to get the family photographs and daguerreotypes, and Grace was shown pictures old and new and given fragments of biography. Here was Red as a baby—even then so good-looking! Red as a little curly boy; Red in the uniform of his school regiment; Red when he graduated from high school.

"He 's the only one that went to college," Theresa said. "Father never believed in it for the boys; he had an idea it spoiled them for business. Besides,

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we were n't rich enough when the others were of college age. Red did n't care about it, either. It was my doing. I was determined to have him have everything worth having. Red, you see, was my baby, really. I was fifteen when mother died, and I took him and did for him just as I would have done if I'd been his mother for a fact.

"Sister Ellen was married; sister Nancy was old enough to be thinking about it; the others were younger: so Red fell to my share, and I suppose that 's why Red is my favorite and I can't conceal it. I 've washed him and spanked him and unsnarled his hair; I 've nursed him through croup and mumps and measles. No brat of my own, I declare to you, Grace, was ever any closer to me than Red. We 've always lived together; I 've brought him up.

"So, having the say, I decided that father must have him go to college. But we 're not bookish people, I 'm afraid. He did n't finish; he only stayed two years, and found he 'd had enough. All he cared for in college was the athletics."

"He could n't have got through, anyhow. He never could have worked off the conditions he 'd piled up," came a voice from over Theresa's shoulder.

Grace looked quickly behind her, and saw Rebecca.

"That 's as it may be." Theresa did not seem in the least annoyed; but Grace's heart quickened with resentment.

"You can't make it out that Red did n't have the

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brains, Becky," Theresa said, with the calm of one making an incontrovertible statement.

Rebecca lifted her chin and let down her eyelids, with the expression of one who thought she might be able to make out a case if she cared to take the trouble —or the risk; then, pointedly, she dropped the subject.

"Emma and Charlie are there," she said. "Charlie 's in the den. Emma wants to see you for something in particular, and has gone up to your room."

Emma and Charlie were Mrs. Vawter's eldest daughter and her husband.

Grace continued to turn over photographs by herself. New voices floating from the rotunda, mixed with laughter and Rebecca's dance music, created the hope that she would not be summoned to meet the callers. She always needed to rise above a degree of shyness to start in with new people, though she disguised it well. Her hope was fulfilled; she relaxed in rest. Fanny left her sewing to go and see who had come, and did not return.

Grace, while wondering what Clare was doing and how much longer it would be before he came looking for her, passed from one photograph to the next, with little thought about them. Strange, how she was always aware of Clare. No matter where he might be —all the time, all the time, her nerves were in an indescribable way aware of him. As an undercurrent

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to all other thoughts, feelings, interests, lay that perpetual consciousness of Clare's being. It was sweet —yet it tired one, too, and was pain, at moments, of its own especial kind. But yet, to lose it would have been to die.

With the turn of mind of one who had composed fairy tales and poems, she paid more intelligent attention when she came to the picture of that Jesse who, as a little boy, had undertaken the task of getting his family together again. He had in ripe manhood just such a face as one might have expected to find: keen and firm, of high character—but hatchet-hard; yet not without humor, and in humor is feeling. From the mother entirely his children must have got their amenity.

Hers were the fine black eyebrows and the wavy hair and the comeliness. She had been called Maria, but Inez Maria had been her full name. This, and the fact of there being among the brothers an Alonzo and among the nieces a Teresita, suggested to Grace the possibility of Spanish ancestry somewhere up the line. And if Spanish, perhaps—in the far back—Arabian. Who could tell? Clare might have derived his crisp curliness from sheiks of the desert. This fancy so appealed to her that she amused herself seeking corroboration of it in the physiognomies of Inez Maria's descendants.

She had thought the room deserted but for herself, and looked up quickly upon hearing a rustle. It

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was Dolores approaching. Grace bent on her at once the smile that tried to win. Dolores gazed back with a sad benignity, which took the place sufficiently well of a smile in that face committed to gravity. The picture she made, with her locks white as powder, her mournful, aristocratic air, and around her throat the black velvet band fastened by a diamond clasp, reminded Grace of a tale from the Reign of Terror: how a young *citoyen* unfastened the clasp of such a velvet band on an interesting stranger found wandering at midnight near the place of executions—and the head fell from the neck.

As Dolores did not take the initiative, Grace hastened to make conversation.

"How interesting they all are!" she exclaimed, referring to the photographs. "They make one long to know all about each one of them. I love to try to read faces, don't you?"

She moved her chair to one side, in a way that invited Dolores to join her in her occupation. Dolores came nearer, as if accepting, but did not seat herself. With one hand, soft and pallid, she reached down to the album, and slowly, as if abstractedly, turned over the leaves until she came to a photograph of herself in youth, placed on the page opposite to a photograph of the husband of whom she was widowed, Miles Overcome. This Overcome, whether because his hair was sleek, or because he wore spectacles, had not the characteristic dominant Overcome air.

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When Grace had had time to examine both photographs, Dolores turned the pages back to a portrait of Black's wife, also in youth—a gentle, mild-eyed woman, who had gone her ways a year or two before. Grace thought her very pleasing, and supposed that Dolores was showing her for that reason.

"Yes—charming," she said.

The pallid hand again moved among the album leaves, softly, taking its time, and stopped when it had turned over another picture of Black's wife, taken long afterward.

"Poor Mrs. Black!" thought Grace. "She must have had wretchedly bad health."

Nothing else that she could think of would explain the contrast, so great, between that blooming young wife and this worn, care-marked, middle-aged woman. She was preparing to say something sympathetic, when Dolores spoke, to deliver herself of a saying that had no bearing whatever, as far as Grace could apprehend, on the things under consideration.

"There are hens," she said, "and there are hawks."

And, while Grace's face questioned her, she looked at Grace intently, penetratingly. Clare had warned her that Dolores was queer.

Vaguely ill at ease, Grace thought it better not to attempt to investigate the illusion in which this singular lady lived.

"The earlier photographs, which have not been retouched, seem to me much the more satisfactory,"—

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she returned to the subject of the photographs, and continued to chatter unassisted until, with relief, she heard Clare calling her from below.

Half a dozen callers were there—cousins and friends, cheerful people, young. There was dancing; there was claret-cup and cake in the dining-room. Grace enjoyed herself like the rest, circling with Clare in the delicious waltz, holding her own in the interchange of jests, as she could do to the point of amazing herself when keyed up by Clare's presence. He charmed her immensely this evening by the good taste of his bearing toward her: attentive to the point of flattery, yet not so attentive as to make himself and her conspicuous.

At last they were gone, the outsiders; the yellow pearls diffused their radiance on empty gallery and floor. Grace was saying good night to Clare, when, to say it more circumstantially, he drew her by a not unwilling hand inside one of those tall doors opening on to the gallery. They stood in a parlor, of rich and somber tones, that she had not yet seen. A shaded lamp cast its circle of brightness on a table with pipes, tobacco-jars, and mannish things. Boxing gloves, swords, Indian clubs, sculls, silver cups such as are awarded for athletic victories, were to be seen in the twilight around. She did not realize that it was Clare's own room until he told her, and with likeable simplicity showed her the boasts of his do-

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main: the elaborately fitted dressing-room contiguous, the goodly bookcase full of authors laughably choice which at night became his bed; the convenience to the front door, permitting him to leave or enter at his own hour without disturbing the household. It had used to be the great doctor's consulting-room, he told her.

From the whole world seeming so very still, she thought at last that everyone must have gone upstairs to bed, and moved to leave him.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night," he said after her, and enfolded her.

She turned her face so that his kiss should light on her cheek or hair. It was her caprice, which he had always respected. But to-night he, with a murmur of protesting fondness, reached insistently for her lips: she must see that something was changed, that a great stride had been taken nearer to each other. For a moment she would have withstood him if she could. Then, closing her eyes, she yielded; and, while deep chords of her being, unawakened until that moment, trembled in response, she tried to feel something sacred in that burning red seal upon their love.

After a stretch—she did not know how long—of the sleep that is like empty hollows of black velvet, she woke without knowing why, and thought herself in her bed at home. Then the memory came back of the luxurious chamber, last vision to smite her open eyes.

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She felt the unfamiliar fineness of her sheets, softness of her mattress. But, even as the warmth of the sun was far from the earth, so pleasure and comfort were withdrawn from the things around her and within. A feverish uneasiness pervaded her; a sickly light lay over all subjects of thought; the night was full of dull, lonely anguish.

She attributed her condition, when she was a little wider awake, to the unaccustomed excitements of the evening, added to the strain and fatigue of the last weeks. She lay, for a space, unaccountably appalled by the sense of that great house around her, with all its unknown so deeply unknown. . . .

She sighed a few times, turned over, and tried to go to sleep—but soon, forgetting her pursuit of forgetfulness, was watching scenes of the past evening as they reënacted themselves on the lighted stage of memory. The most casual things looked disquieting in that hushed and heavy hour: the redly glimmering low door; the haggard face of the photograph; the eyes of Dolores burdened with meaning—but meaning what? . . .

All of which abruptly faded when shame and remorse clutched her with punishing hands, at the recognition that not once since crossing the threshold of this house had she thought of her father. She had gone to sleep, for the first time since he died, without turning her mind toward him, sending him one good-night message. Was it possible that riches and

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pleasures and love-making would be able to obliterate an image so rightly dear? Ah, she had proved herself a shallow thing!

She humbled herself to the immortal part of Winfred Ingalis with the whole of her contrite heart; protested the truth of her affection, and implored pardon, and cried a little; and went to sleep, chastened, full of high resolves.

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CHAPTER IX

"DON'T get up till you feel like it," Theresa had bidden her; and Grace had been happy to imagine herself in a fairy palace where such things could be done without the compunctions that accompany indulgences of the kind in lesser places.

She came to herself at a faint rattle of dishes and fragrance of coffee: Sita was standing near, holding a tray. Having piled pillows at Grace's back and placed her breakfast on her knees, the girl seated herself on the foot of the bed.

"Don't apologize!" she dismissed Grace's polite phrases. "We all do it. If you sit up late you can't be expected to get up early. In this family, if you stay in bed long enough, somebody or other brings you something to eat. Mother sees to it."

Sita's eyes were wandering around the room.

"Were n't you tired too?" Grace asked her. "Were n't you up as late as I? How did you wake up so much earlier?"

"I guess you 'd wake up if you slept with Zip, in the room next to Aunt Dolores. Zip has a way of gritting her teeth that 's perfectly maddening; then, all of a sudden, she 'll double up like a jackknife snapping shut, and land her cocoanut in the middle

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of your stomach. Take that, along with Aunt Dolores sawing wood all night. . . ."

"Why, Miss Sita, what a shame!"

"Don't you care! I suppose I 'll get used to it."

Sita's melting dark eyes continued to wander around the room with an expression that could be interpreted as marking regret mingled with a sense of injury.

Grace's long, sound morning sleep had done her a world of good. She had waked with nerves composed—more, indeed, than that: she had waked with something very like elation taking the place of those creepy, causeless midnight misgivings. She was going to take possession of her new world in the manner of one equal, through the spirit, to all its problems, tasks, and encounters. She rejoiced in the mere multifariousness of life as it now offered itself, affording endless objects for the exercise of her faculties. It was, with her, one of those mornings of youth when the novice, girded for adventure, is lifted upon the consciousness, or the illusion, of illimitable strength—capacity to provide out of deep funds within him for whatever chance may come. In this mood, rich and spendthrift, the desire to endear herself to Clare's people without exception made her reckless of what there might be to pay. An especial magnanimity was in order, anyhow, in the case of one who, like Sita, had given evidence of eagerness on her side.

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"Was this your room before I came?" Grace asked.

Sita stared at her a moment.

"Yes, it was. How did you know?"

"You don't seem quite used to Zip and Aunt Dolores."

"You 're right. I 'd had this room since Emma got married—the first time I ever did have a room to myself. But, of course, I don't mind giving it up to you. I don't mind, because I like you. Don't tell Mother I let on."

"My dear Miss Sita, quite the greatest favor you could do me would be to come back to your own room, if you would n't mind my sharing it. I am a quiet sleeper, I believe, and you know that I have n't many clothes and things. There will be plenty of room for both of us, and I shall be so much happier. You certainly must come."

"Do you mean it? Oh, Miss Ingalis, what a perfect darling you are!" Sita jumped up to squeeze her in a joyous bear-hug. "You 're lots nicer than I thought anybody could be, if you *are n't* our kind. You 're sure now you want me? You know, I shall have to tell Mother you insisted."

When Clarence heard, that evening, of this insistence of Grace's—

"What made you do that, O Amiable One?" he in-

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quired. "You will find it—to use one of your own expressions—direful."

But Theresa, upon Grace's saying the proper thing, had raised no objection—being, indeed, glad to have her child stop fussing to her in private about the burdens unfairly put upon her because she was younger and better-natured than Pinky or Rebecca.

"Now, when exactly are you children thinking of getting married?" Theresa asked point-blank that same evening, at a moment when she and Clarence and Grace were by themselves.

"Soon," said Clarence, pressing Grace's hand devoutly. "Sooner. Soonest. Grace, set the day."

Grace stammered a little in saying: "I have always thought that a year was the shortest—"

But an outcry from Clare and Theresa, wonderfully of one mind and one voice, cast her back, deeply blushing, into silence.

"Did you hear the hard-hearted little thing!" cried Theresa. "I never knew anything like it. What have you got against the poor boy? A year, did you say? A *year?* Why, what do you want to wait for? Isn't everything all right? Come, now, Grace, give us a human answer. What do you say, Red?"

"I say that a year is all right, and about what I should have expected from the pale-rose lips of the well-brought-up Miss Ingalis. But to fall in with it

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would look like a powerful lack of enthusiasm on my part. Try again, Grace. Take a tip: don't make it a day over three months."

"Yes, yes," agreed Theresa. "Three months is more than enough. The idea! And three short months, too, so as to get it into June. June is the month for weddings. Say the end of June: that will give us time for everything."

Grace had arrived at a theory that she must hold her own against Clare. Sometimes, when disposed to be submissive, she made herself stiff and wayward, taught by intuition that she was thus finally more delightful to him. She would have liked in this case to be obstinate; but the fact that she was to be a guest of the Overcomes until her marriage made it seem indelicate to set a term deemed by her hostess so extremely long.

"Whose prerogative is it supposed to be to set the day?" she asked, with a sparkle of that sprightliness which she was learning to affect. "Do I remember rightly that it is the bride's? Well, then. I will be reasonable, however; I won't claim it entire. We will do before marriage, Clare, as nice people do after it: each go half way in making concessions. So—we 'll have the wedding in half the length of time I proposed, and in twice the time proposed by you; that is to say, in six months. Are you suited?"

Theresa accepted the compromise as fair, and made calculations.

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"That will take us into September. Six months from the beginning of your engagement will take us to the second week in September. You 'll have to be married, then, from our summer home on Jaffa Road. Well, we can give you just as pretty a wedding there as here. The family moves out to Jaffa Road the end of June, and the men come down by train every afternoon. We 'll have to set about getting your things at once, my child, so as to be through before July, for we sha'n't want to be running back and forth in hot weather."

In her aspiration to establish charming relations between herself and the different members of his family, Grace received small support from Clare. His attitude was that of saying, "What makes you bother? Let it work out as it will. You 're a lot too good for them." He was immensely candid with regard to his family, calling them whatever names at the moment best represented his meaning, however unflattering it might be. Grace suspected him, none the less, of a strong clan feeling, of its own kind. She continued tactfully trying to show liking and make herself liked.

Aside from Sita, whose conquest was really too easy, she felt least shyness with Dolores, toward whom she was impelled by a kind of pity—pity on fairly intangible grounds; for, although the offhand manner of the family seemed out of keeping when applied to

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Dolores, this was not sufficient to create pity. She put into her smile a double dose of honey when bending it on Dolores. The depressing lady seemed not to care to talk, yet must like—as everybody likes—to be the object of a distinguishing and appreciative smile. Meeting her on the way to mass,—Dolores went daily to mass,—Grace would say ingratiatingly, "Pray for me too!" At which Dolores would bow assent in entire seriousness and, Grace fancied, make it a point of conscience so to pray.

Several times Grace had seen on the stairs a large, middle-aged woman, carrying covered dishes on a tray, before the repetition of this event had suggested the question, "Is anybody ill? Who lives upstairs?"

She was with Dolores, Dolores returning from mass, when her curiosity came to a point, and she asked the question prompted by the sight of the servant approaching with her tray.

"It is Miss Overcome who lives upstairs," Dolores answered. "Aunt Marinda," she elucidated.

Grace remembered at once: that Marinda, sister of Jesse and William and Sylvanus—one of the four orphans distributed and dispersed, who by this time must be an old, old woman.

"And she is ill?"

"She cannot walk or stand. She never leaves her room. Good morning, Nora."

Grace's eyes took in more consciously the face of

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the large woman in a blue-striped gingham as she passed them, and she liked its broad kindness, its small pretty eyes like a child's, even its button nose, comically counterbalanced by a button of gray hair at the back of the head.

She expressed to Theresa, that day, her desire to be made acquainted with Marinda. Already when she was much younger Grace had discovered as one of the painful things that a person learns in life, if he be at all observant or sensitive, that there is among people in their strength and health a disposition to neglect the old; also, that old people pathetically love remembrance and affection from the young. This perception had created in her a habit of regard for them, in part ideal of chivalry, in part honest tenderness.

Theresa looked at her, when she made the request, as if she thought it supererogatory; her glance intimated that Grace would not find the enterprise rewarding: if it had been anything in the nature of a treat, would it not have been proposed?

But she readily consented.

"Come on," she said, and led the way.

They climbed to the top of the house; Theresa knocked at a door.

The room they entered was so different from her unconscious expectation that Grace made a small, unguarded sound of surprise. It was as if a magic carpet had transported them in a twinkling from the

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city to an old-fashioned country house, filled with a countrywoman's old-fashioned belongings. There was even the faintly musty smell that is exhaled from old things.

Near the embrasure formed by one of the mansard windows stood a high-backed chair, covered with a faded goods printed with once gay flowers, and furnished with projections designed to shield the ears from draughts. In this sat an ancient lady, with her feet raised on a stool, and a shawl tucked around her up to the waist.

"Well, Aunt Marinda, how do you do to-day?" Theresa asked in bracing, cheerful tones, which she sharpened to penetrate the dull ear of age. "I 've brought Red's young lady up to see you."

"Oh, Red's young lady." Aunt Marinda spoke in a voice unexpectedly deep, and, after a moment of vagueness, took the hand that Grace at once extended with her pretty smile. She looked from one to the other, as if still in doubt; then, "Yes, I remember," she nodded.

"Her name is Grace—Grace Ingalis."

"Oh—Grace. Same as the other."

"Aunt Marinda, I guess you are n't quite awake yet. Did we break into your nap? See, here 's a letter from Sarah I 've brought for you to read. I 'm going to leave it for you to look at when you 're ready. She 's got a lot to say about Belle's baby. They 're going to call it Sally Marinda. Are n't you pleased?"

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Grace was happy to feel that, with Theresa at hand, there would fall upon her no obligation to talk. She could talk so much better another time, when she came up here alone.

This strange, delightful room! Strange through its mere existence in the same house as the ambitious apartments below; delightful in being so like something in a story book. In a corner stood a solid four-post bed, with colored patchwork spreading over its mound of feathers. The chair she had taken was an old wooden one with worn seat and rungs; on the floor lay braided rag carpets, dim with long use. An iron stove with little Gothic windows shed that even, caressing heat which old people so much prefer to fresh air. In which details, the room was not unlike rooms Grace had seen before. What made the place curious was to find in it so much that ordinarily would have been relegated to the store-room, not to say the rubbish heap.

Piled in the corners, on the deep window-sills, on the old lounge and under it, were boxes and boxes, bundles and bundles, sheaves of yellowed newspapers and magazines, picture-frames laid one on top of another, with here and there revealed such private and personal treasures as a stuffed black-and-tan terrier, a bunch of ghost-white flowers—bridal or funeral?—stiffened and eternized by a preparation of wax. The eye received from these promiscuous stacks of portable property an impression of irregularity, but not

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exactly of disorder; for the things were systematized and condensed as far as possible, so as to leave a fair remainder of space to live in.

It might be thought that when Aunt Marinda transferred herself to her brother's house in town it had been too late to wean her from the familiar possessions. She had brought along the accumulations of a life, bestowed them temporarily, then grown accustomed to the angles and shadows they made. Perhaps there had been some idea at first of making selection, reduction, destruction. Perhaps her great affliction had overtaken her before it could be carried into effect. However that might be, there stood the dim, unsorted things: one glimpsed them on top of the wardrobe; one divined them under the bed, hidden by the valance.

Theresa tilted forward and backward in an old wooden rocking-chair painted pale yellow and embellished with pale purple grapes, and cheerily fed the old relative with news of the numerous family. Aunt Marinda was no doubt interested,—could one conceive an aged countrywoman not refreshed by a good string of gossip?—but she did little to keep the conversation alive. Theresa did not wait for her; she gave to the occasion an effect of entire social success by reeling off her ready talk alone, with hardly an interruption.

"Lonzo is thinking of building—did Dolores tell you? Carrie wants him to buy the house her brother

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wants to sell; but Lonzo does n't see it, and I don't blame him. It 's gloomy and it 's cramped. We 're watching to see who 'll come out ahead, whether she 'll get her way or he his. I guess it 'll end in their building. I guess it 's safe to put your money on the Overcome side of the house."

Grace, meanwhile, could study the old lady's face without rudeness. She perceived in her some resemblance to the pictures of her brother, but was reminded more of someone else. She had seen before that bony, elongated face, with the large eye-sockets and the great dignity.

That Aunt Marinda should be paralyzed seemed to Grace the more tragic in that she had, to the most casual observation, a great deal of character, and must have been purposeful, powerful, active. There was something mannish about her, with her gruff chest-voice and bit of beard, so that the trifling headgear of black lace and velvet, worn by old ladies to hide their thin spot, seemed in her case a foolish, impertinent affair.

Grace found herself immensely, respectfully sorry for Aunt Marinda, not the less so because Aunt Marinda looked strong in patience and able to bear her lot. From the serious-looking black book on the little table at her elbow, she presumed that Aunt Marinda was religious. But, religious as you might be, and possessed of superhuman comforts, it seemed to Grace a sad thing to be old: to be at the end of things—love

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finished, work finished, hope abbreviated, nothing from day to day to thrill you, the sun gone dim with the dimness of your eyes, nothing to look forward to but the chilly, uncongenial mysteries of the next world, and those only to be arrived at after that throe, that transition, the thought of which is so repulsive to warm young flesh and blood! . . . A great deal of sympathy was due to the old, it seemed to Grace.

"Well, Aunt Marinda,"—Theresa talked glibly on, but an intimation was in her cadence that she approached the point of winding up,—"the wedding day is set for the second week in September; so you see we have plenty to do before going to Jaffa Road this season. Red's house has all got to be made ready, too. The carpenters and painters are only just out of it. They 'll be busy days for us from this onward till the wedding day."

At reference to the wedding, Aunt Marinda's eyes turned toward Grace, and Grace took the occasion to introduce into her smile the final essence of all her thoughts on old age. The two let their glances rest upon each other with directness and simplicity. Rays from faded blue fires at the back of shadowy caverns met with the gold-brown light of clear woodland wells.

"You seem to be a nice little thing," Aunt Marinda came out, addressing herself to Grace, and breaking unceremoniously across Theresa's chatter to

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do it. "What makes you want to marry into this family?"

"Well, I like that!" Theresa burst out laughing. "Who 're you hitting, Aunt? The family or Grace? You do have a way of saying things!"

She did not seem anything but amused; but, when she had caught Grace's eye, she shot a glance at her such as people exchange behind the back of the demented, and got up as if she felt it time to go.

"We don't want to stay long enough to tire you, Aunt. Good-by. I hope the boys below don't make noise enough to disturb you. If they do, you must let me know. Send me word by Nora any time there 's anything I can do for you."

As she held out her hand to take Aunt Marinda's in farewell, Grace was reimpressed by the likeness she had noted. Who was it that Aunt Marinda resembled, so severe as she looked, but also gentle and, possibly, a little cracked? Who but her dear old friend, and her father's particular favorite, that valorous knight of the Mancha, Don Quixote?

On the way downstairs, Theresa said: "Isn't she a freak? You never can tell what she 'll be like. Some days you 'll find her in a sort of daze, like to-day, when she gets all mixed up and does n't know what she 's dreamed and what is so. Once you know it, you 're all right. Sometimes, though, she has scolding fits, when—my conscience!—you want to keep

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clear of her. They 're the reason that some of the family—Red, for instance—never go near her. When that 's on her, she appears to have a grudge against the lot of us. It 's her mind failing, of course. The girls go up, from time to time; but they hate it so, I don't make them. I sit with her a good deal myself, though, and so does Dolores; and Sylvanus goes up there nearly every evening."

"Well, lunacy is n't catching, thank goodness," Clare said cheerfully to Grace, when she had told him of her visit to his aunt. "But I would n't waste much time on the old girl. She won't know the difference, and I don't see what good you can get out of it."

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CHAPTER X

GRACE, who had only sipped at the cup of pleasure—the kind of thing that is thought worthy of the name by a world that would become ironical if the enjoyment of books and nature and the conversation of a dear father were included in the draught,—Grace, who had only sipped before, drank, now that it was offered to her, without stint, like one to the manner born. There were gatherings, informal festivities, almost nightly in the house of one or another of the large family—the married brothers and sisters, the married children and their circles. At these there was dancing and eating, with much joviality of a young and robust sort, as among people finding what they had got thoroughly desirable, and converting their satisfaction in good clothes, good food, and handsome houses into good spirits.

It was a trait of the Overcomes, whose fortunes had been made in commerce, to be pleased with the world of things opened to them by that, and to foster no hankerings after any society that felt itself better than they. There were among them no so-called "climbers." They liked what they had, and if they desired more it was more of the same kind. Grace found no fault with the quality of the entertainments

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offered her; they had the necessary color, abundance, and variety to produce the right excitement, the sensation of living to the full. It was a luxury, after a while, to feel a little sated, and be able to take them more carelessly.

What with late rising, the hours spent shopping with Theresa, the time given to Clare, the evenings filled with parties and theaters and suppers, she had no time for study, hardly for ordinary reading—she who had cared so greatly for books! She fancied that an ailment would grow in her from this lack, as from the absence of a vital element in one's diet, whereby some organ or nerve is starved. She chose for herself a few books, serious, requiring concentration. If through the day she had not found the quiet hour in which to read, she would do it the last thing before bed. She would read, obstinately, though it were two o'clock in the morning, though it were standing in her night-dress under the gas-light, —she would read if it were only a single sonnet, if it were only "The World is too much with us,"—and go to sleep with a connection established between her self that used to live so much in the coolly shimmering silvery and opaline world of poetry, and this new person called upon to give heart and mind to such a different, distracting, crimson-and-gold-lighted world.

When a month had passed, her hope of making herself dear to all the Overcomes had undergone modi-

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fications. She knew by that time what could be done and what could not.

Her desire for popularity among Clare's family had risen in part from a desire to be quite perfect toward him. But, since he genuinely cared so little. . . .

In part she had wanted to be liked because that was the ideal: to live with your neighbor in more than a mere absence of friction. Human relations should have positive amenity; fellow guests at the great Inn should go toward each other with hands extended, offering flowers and fruit. . . .

But at the end of a month she was willing to let all that be, even as Clare had bidden her. Clare had his own kind of wisdom.

Some of the Overcomes could not be made to care for her; and others, the truth was, she did not much care for.

She found comfort at all times in Theresa, who regarded her explicitly as the rightest person in the world for Red, and a reason for congratulation to the whole house of Overcome. Theresa and Red were enough to keep the most modest of girls in conceit; and, as far as conceit was concerned, the rest did nothing to shake it, for their attitude—which one got like an emanation—was that of regarding her as, while not of their kind, belonging to a kind that would naturally think itself entitled to put on airs with them.

Her little early attempts to deserve some mark of

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regard from the head of the house had the fate of those seeds in the parable that were scattered on rock. Black was grimly unamenable to the fascinations of little girls. Curious, to see him at his end of the table, acting just like a human being, handsome in a gray granite way, having—though mostly rather silent—a twist of hard humor and any quantity of hard sense, and yet not quite having human feelings. For, if a person smiles to you in a soft, sunny way, it is only human to reflect back a little warmth. Grace became a tiny bit afraid of Black.

Uncle Sylvanus appeared to her a gentle being, with his look of an old woman with short white hair, and cheeks incapable of a beard, and eyes that infinitely kept their own counsel. She felt an affinity between him and herself; but when she attempted to talk with him, he baffled her like a snail retiring into his shell, and she discovered amusement in the others over her freshness in attempting a difficult and worthless task. She learned that Sylvanus was the one of the family who had "never amounted to anything." But old Jesse had felt fraternal toward him too, and given him a share in the business and a right in the house, the same as to his sister Marinda. They could not turn old Sylvanus out, if he did from time to time go on a darkling expedition alluded to as a "spree." They could award him, though, a sleeping apartment in the cellar, as it were,—a darkish, moldy-smelling room entered from the den, to which he could be con-

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ducted without scandal when his step was unsteady and he was not to be restrained from lifting his voice in song.

In the case of Simeon Vawter, Grace had had little hope from the first. He was not stone, like Black; he was wood. There was proof of his excellent, even exceptional capacity in the clothiers' business; but that did not make him, from Grace's standpoint, easy to talk with. Beyond the flattest commonplaces, she did not know what to say to him. After giving him up, however, she rather liked him. His dry, sandy face had a superior, silent good sense. It was funny to feel about him as a man who, in spite of the appearance given to the situation by the fact of wife and children, had once and for all made up his mind to have nothing to do with any of the people around him. Between him and Theresa there existed, as far as one could tell, good accord, though no visible sentiment; between him and his children natural feeling without demonstrativeness.

Toward his daughter Pinky, Grace had taken the steps requisite for the cultivation of friendship, to find her before long rather too unrewarding for one to wish to proceed very far. When Pinky let herself go, one day, to the point of making confidences and revealing her shy, inmost aspirations, she said she should like to be a hotel-keeper or else the wife of one, with the huge linen supplies belonging to such an estate—towels, sheets and pillow-cases, table-cloths and

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napkins, all indelibly marked; and then thousands and thousands of plated knives and forks, also marked; and purchases of food to be made on a colossal scale, at bargain prices; and then, of course, all the money rolling in—

Grace had shown herself genial, but a limit had been set to the distance the two could travel together. Grace never offered to read her favorite lines on "Tintern Abbey" with Pinky, nor the "Ode to the West Wind"; she never showed her into the region of her own dreams, where the horizon mountains were very dim, but very high.

In the case of Sita the trouble was different. Instead of being too cool and dry, Sita was too warm and sticky. Having conceived the glowing hope of being best friends with Grace, in the school-girl sense of the word, she did her part toward it with vigor, and before her attacks Grace self-protectingly drew back. Grace had an inborn horror of false relations, conjunctions demanding the show of more than is really felt. At the same time, she could never snub one who came meaning kindness and compliment, any more than she could beat off the most graceless dog that clumsily exhibited affection by pawing her dress and licking her chin. So she turned into fun Sita's ravings over the beauty of her hair, or the smoothness of her skin, when they undressed for bed in the room they shared; she fought off her fondlings with playfulness and irony.

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With Zip it was still different; and after a few trials at making friends with her, Grace let the rude little thing be. Zip plainly could not bear her, and showed it as much as she dared, with the fear of her mother on her and that of her Uncle Red. Grace only understood when she was told that it was a result of the child's surprising jealousy of her in connection with Red, whose pet Zip had been all her life. Grace would have liked to assuage that hurt, but Zip could be too horrid; it seemed better, finally, to let her alone, like a little stinging nettle, a little prickly hedgehog.

Then, there were Black's sons. These young fellows had gone into business life early—which, since they showed no taste for book-learning, was no doubt the best thing for them. Grace marveled how they, like Clare, could sit up to all hours, dancing and junketing, then go to their work in the morning with rigid punctuality. Another evidence of the admirable Overcome vitality. Grace had occasion to make reflections upon that vitality sometimes after she had gone to bed ever so late, when, just as she was dropping off to sleep, bumps and rumbles overhead would draw her back to the world, and she would remember that it was only Alec and Junior working off their superfluous strength and animality in rough-and-tumble play, or a wrestling match, or a simple fight.

As neither of the boys made a motion toward her, Grace thought they were perhaps waiting for her, the

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future aunt, to take the initiative. With a delicate trepidation, but well concealed, she made Alec the object of a tentative amiability—to see him pounce upon it, young hawk with the lawless gleam in his eye, as if with all his talons, and to suspect in him some lust for scoring against his uncle, which this gave him the chance to fancy he was doing. A something too subtle to fix upon, fainter than the faintest gather between Clare's brows, warned her of a blunder. She was cautious after that with Alec, whose eye became, she thought, derisive, and stung her to dislike. She did not make the same mistake with Junior: Junior, for one thing, had the misfortune to remind her of Sita.

With Rebecca she had supposed she was getting along quite nicely, when Rebecca made an unprovoked remark that could have no object, it seemed to Grace, but to express antipathy. "There sits Grace," she called out to the others, "making mental reservations by the hour!" Grace colored darkly and found nothing to reply.

That, then, was how she appeared to Rebecca—like one thinking herself superior to the rest and judging them from a height: a sufficient explanation of the hostility which she, from that time onward, distinguished in Rebecca's attitude toward her. She was sorry. Because Rebecca—though she rather hated Rebecca now—was the one of all the young people whom she could have liked most. Rebecca in her

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riding-habit, with her neat top-hat, her gauntlets and quirt, had the attraction for Grace of a figure in romance. Not the good heroine, but the other, the darkling, the fascinating one. Though Rebecca's black eyes were bold, and her pouting red lips in a sleepy, latent way cruel, one could quite well imagine warmth of heart in her, headlong, headstrong loyalty, where once it had been enlisted.

But there was no use trying, Grace felt—the less so that Rebecca was right about the mental reservations. She wished, when it was too late, that she had had the spirit and readiness to reply, as she could only have done in truth had she been a different kind of person: "If you had an inkling, my dear girl, how strange and novel are to me some of your ways,—your squabbles, your points of view, the quality of your gossip, the tone of your conversation, the taste of your remarks and sometimes of your dresses,—I have a notion that you would regard it as a mercy that I do reserve my mind!"

Yes, Rebecca was right about the mental reservations. Only, there was so much else to consider, which, if Rebecca had done, she might have granted to Grace some of that devotion of which she looked capable. But Rebecca was offensive and unladylike. She was petty, too, and unfair: she discussed Grace with the others—Grace knew it because she more than once caught her name in conversations not meant for her ears. She wondered what was said.

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There was a young man, by name Harvey Stokes, who haunted the house and was sure to turn up at the places where they went—a suitor for Rebecca's favor, plainly. Sitting not far from the two, Grace overheard them talking about her; but, since they did not notice her neighborhood, she did not move out of hearing, embarrassed by the feeling that it would embarrass them to be made aware of her. "Grace—" she heard, and "Grace" again, and "Grace." The young man also took the liberty of calling her "Grace." She did not hear the rest, until her ear caught Rebecca quoting her as saying something she had never said—upon which she knew that the two, having realized her presence, were trying to mislead her into thinking it was not of her they were speaking, but of some other Grace. "Grace declares," Rebecca said, simulating great earnestness, "that it is, first and last, just a miserable misunderstanding." At which Grace felt at liberty to rise and take herself farther. It was possible, of course, that they were talking about another Grace; our heroine had her own opinion as to that. She felt that she constituted an offense to Rebecca merely by existing at her side, and to try to make her swain see her with her own spiteful eye was what Rebecca would vulgarly do.

These things troubled Grace only now and then, and for minutes at a time. There was too much else making demand on her for thought and emotion.

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Then, there were Clare and Theresa—when all was said, the most telling personalities in the house, if not the most important persons. Fortified by their approval, she truly did not need to care about the others. There were all the activities, all the diversions. There was the wonder of never being scolded or disciplined or called selfish and slack and inefficient, and made thereby to feel so, hopelessly; but being represented to herself as the precious acquisition, the new event, the bird-of-paradise among crows. It was mere graciousness to make little of Zip's and Rebecca's and Alec's discourtesies. If a twinge was inseparable from the recognition that someone unkindly did not like you, it must be treated with philosophy: patience for the present, and trust in the future for bringing things round.

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CHAPTER XI

GRACE had always regarded shopping as a wearisome, unescapable annoyance; but buying pretty things for a bride, with Theresa as an assistant, enthusiastic and indefatigable, belonged to events of a different category. Theresa lightened the burden of choosing among a multitude of things by being definite in taste and quick in decision. She carried before the mental eye an image of what Grace ought to look like as a married woman, which Grace did not; and Grace, with the feeling that Theresa in this matter represented Clare, took her counsel in almost every case without demur.

"Come! Red doesn't want to marry a little convent girl!" Theresa said, with the good-humored bluffness that makes such a happy conveyance for criticism, as she swept aside a humbly dainty pile of snowy linen with small embroideries, looked upon with hesitating favor by Grace. "These monotonous little puritan garments are for little old maids, my dear! You want to keep Red captivated, you know. Nothing in your life, let me tell you, will ever be more important to you than that."

And she had directed the choosing with such ef-

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fect that the trousseau which Grace found herself acquiring cast her in a state of vast doubt. But when she put on, to try them, the filmy, lacy, coquettish things, she could not but be struck by the change they wrought, the charm they imparted to the figure before her in the glass. She captivated herself while revolving the thought of captivating Clare. Was it possible that all it took to be an enchantress was the right clothing? . . . Theresa had seemed to regard it as a duty that she make herself into an enchantress for Clare.

As she gazed into the eyes gazing back from her reflection, potentialities of her nature, submerged beneath accumulations of training and maxim, floated nearer to the surface, and she was instructed through all her quickened nerves of the zest to be found in cultivating arts of beauty for the power that beauty gives.

While Theresa helped Grace to buy her wardrobe, it was with Clare she went to choose the more important pieces of furniture for their house. But in the minor matters—draperies, linen, utensils—it was again Theresa who gave the advantage of her lights.

In entering the new house, now almost ready to receive a happy bridal pair, Grace would still have sometimes that old feeling of being in a dream. No, it was not possible, every appearance notwithstanding, that she should become mistress of all this. . . .

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Which did not prevent her acting more and more like one with authority to carry out her ideas in her own house, sometimes even going—but amiably and deprecatingly—against the older woman's well founded preferences.

One room about which she had shown herself discreetly unmanageable puzzled Theresa.

"My child," she said, "I have refrained from opening my lips on the subject of this room, as I consider it a mother-in-law's duty to shut her mouth on a great many occasions when she 's burning to have her say. But this room, Grace—it passes my guessing why you have wanted it just like this. It is n't one bit like you, who are a serious little person."

"It is not meant for me."

"It 's the guest-room; I know that. I meant—it does n't seem a bit like you to want it this way. It 's pretty, after a fashion, I grant you; but you could have had it so solid and handsome and durable for the same money. This all looks so flimsy and perishable and feminine. A guest-room ought to be equally appropriate for a man or a woman."

"Roses, roses everywhere—" murmured Grace, looking around her.

"Yes. But that rose cretonne, I have a strong notion, is going to fade."

"Like real roses, then. We shall have to renew them. This room, Theresa dear, which I have been so self-willed about, has been arranged to please, and

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be exceedingly becoming to, the first guest who will occupy it—the guest who, as I hope, will make us the most frequent and longest visits. In composing it I kept a picture of her before my mind. I also remembered things I have heard her say. Her tastes are not a bit like mine. It will all the more be apparent that I cared above everything to please her."

"What friend is this, Grace?"

"My very dearest. Outside of your family, I might almost say my only one. You ought to be able to guess. Mrs. Lamont."

"Oh—Mrs. Lamont."

Theresa seated herself on a chuffy little sofa that was like a lapful of pink roses, and rested her feet on a rug that was almost white. While revolving the name she had just heard and the ideas attached to it, she looked around the room again, as if, with her new information, to see it in a new light. Grace dropped beside her, and let her eyes too move from part to part of her creation, smiling with pleasure at the light-minded prettiness, the tender gaiety of the whole.

"Grace," said Theresa, "why on earth did you make such a mystery of your idea in fixing up this room?"

Grace gave her an arch sidelong look, then rubbed up against her shoulder disarmingly.

"I didn't wish to be struggled with!"

"Did you tell Red?"

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Grace shook her head. "No. Red has said so often that I 'm to have things just as I want them. He is fond of saying, too, that the queen can do no wrong. For once, I felt like acting upon it. He thinks the room lovely, anyhow. He does n't see, as you do, that all this white will have to go periodically to the cleaners. But if I had told him that I was doing it all for the sake of someone else he might have objected. Because Clare, you see, while he never grudges me anything for myself, does n't approve, I have discovered, of my doing unselfish things. In the case of dear Ida Lamont, the little compliment embodied in this room would come as gracefully from him as from me."

There was another short silence, during which, as before, both women, with very different thoughts in their minds, let their eyes move around the fanciful, deliberately frivolous room.

"Grace," Theresa again spoke up, "talk to me a little about this Mrs. Lamont. How did you come to know her?"

"My father had taken me for a couple of weeks to Sugar Hill in the White Mountains—it will be four years ago this summer. And Mrs. Lamont, who was Miss Ida Manville at that time, was staying at the same hotel. We did n't know anybody; neither did she. We got acquainted by Papa filling her glass for her in the spring-house. After that, whenever she went to drive she asked us to go with her, and we

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returned the compliment. So we were a great deal together. She took to us, as she has told me since. And we delighted in her. Yet, except for a Christmas card the first year, we lost touch with each other after we came away. She lived in New York. But she had said she would be sure to look us up if ever she came our way. And she did. She is such a faithful, affectionate dear. Then—you know the rest: how she picked me up and made me go with them. If it had n't been for that—"

"You might never have seen Red. That 's true, too. Are you very, very fond of her?"

"I adore her. Even aside from all I owe her, you have no idea of her attractiveness, her delicious funniness and good spirits. She is five or six years older than I am, but she seems younger, somehow. And then, her generosity. I believe she is the most generous person in the world. She gives the clothes off her back, literally. This that I have on she made me take because she could n't bear the sight of me in mourning. I wear it all the time; I love to wear it, because it was hers. So, you see, nothing I do for her can be too much. This room—"

"Grace, I 'm sorry you 're so fond of her," said Theresa, without looking at her.

"Sorry? What do you mean, dear?"

As if with an effort after resolution, Theresa turned her head so as to face Grace squarely, and Grace gathered an evil omen from her expression.

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"I am sorry, my child, because I 'm afraid what I 've got to tell you will be a shock. When you met Miss Manville at your mountain hotel you knew nothing whatever about her, did you? You very naturally supposed she was all right."

"Theresa, what are you trying to tell me?"

"That she was not, my child; that 's the amount of it. I 'm awfully sorry to give you a disillusion, but I don't see how it can be helped. If you 're going to ask her to visit you in this house, I want you at least to know whom you 're asking."

"Theresa, you can't make me believe—"

"My sweet little girl, you don't claim to know the world very well, now do you? You 're quite safe in believing what I tell you. I have no intention of saying one unkind word about your friend—who, I have no doubt, is exactly as generous, faithful and affectionate and good fun as you make her out. What I am going to say is that she has what is called a 'past.' Perhaps you won't like her a bit less for it. It all depends. But it does make a difference in the suitability of asking her here."

"What is there against her, Theresa?"

"What there *was* against her was a disagreeable, inconvenient, unshakable wife, whose husband could n't quite make up his mind to choke her and marry Ida. So that Ida—adapted herself to the circumstances. Let her excuse be that she loved much, and that he loved equally. This went on for years, with

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a steadiness that gave the affair a kind of—almost respectability. Then the wife providentially was taken off, and everybody supposed the two would marry. But no such thing. By that time he had gotten over the notion. He sneaked out of it. He had the excuse of a young daughter due to come home from her boarding-school in Europe. Ida was terribly broken up over the whole thing. But she made the best of it finally, accepted a good little income from him, and tried to forget him by marrying someone else."

"Oh, poor Ida!" cried Grace, with a catch in her breath, and held her hands over her eyes. "Poor, poor Ida!"

"Yes, my dear. Give her sympathy, but don't go on idealizing her."

"How do you know all this? Who told you?"

"Who? Red, of course. Sydney Morgan was a friend of his—member of the same yacht club at Jaffa Road. Red first met Ida on board Morgan's yacht. He had to have some place besides New York where they could be together."

"So when Clare met us on board the *Pretoria*, he—"

"Yes. But if you 're thinking he for a single instant made the slightest mistake about you, you 're wrong. No one, my child, could make any mistake about you, no matter whom you were traveling with. He saw the whole thing at a glance. It 's quite like

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that sort of person, you know, to love to be seen in public as close friends with someone there can be no doubt about. And she had her excellent old army man to impress—"

"Theresa, don't speak of Ida, *please*, as 'that sort of person,'" begged Grace, who had visibly winced. "And please not to interpret her to me. You can tell me facts, if you have them to tell; but to me who know her—know her nature so really well, her large-hearted, generous nature—you must n't explain her motives."

"I did n't mean to hurt your feelings, Grace. If you think this has been a pleasant duty—"

"Oh, I know it has n't. I know you 're as kind as you can be. But now—now what am I going to do?"

"Do? Nothing, my child. That 's the point. Nothing. Don't ask her to visit you."

"But we 've spoken of it. She expects it. I owe her so much. Without her—"

"You regard her as having made the match. Heaven made it, my dear. She was its very poor instrument. If you had not been what you are—Your connection with Ida Lamont, you must see for yourself, was hardly a recommendation."

"Clare and she seemed such good friends!"

"You will find, as you learn the ways of the world, that a man is n't and does n't have to be as particular as a woman. Clare no doubt liked her very much. That sort of person—I beg your pardon; I

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mean—ladies of her kind are very likely to be just what you describe, good-hearted, lavish, amusing. Red would very naturally take pleasure in her society."

"Would he object, do you think, to my asking her here?"

"Grace, don't put it to him. It would n't be fair. You know he can't refuse when you ask—he 's silly about you. His not having told you about Ida himself shows how much he would hate to hurt your feelings. He thinks you 're such a little idealist. Does n't it seem to you he deserves some consideration in return? For a young bride to invite to her house the very first thing a— One must draw the line somewhere, my dear. Things have a way of leaking out and making talk. The situation is simple, after all. Instead of asking her, you don't ask her. When the invitation to visit you does n't come, she 'll understand, bless your heart. She 'll think it 's Red who has put his foot down: she won't make any comment. You can go on writing to her if you wish; but after a while, you 'll see, the thing will taper off and die."

"No, no. I 'll find some other way to show my gratitude."

"My child, nothing is owed her. People can't expect everything. If you have the fun of kicking over the traces, you can't have all the advantages, too, of being moral."

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"I don't know what to think, Theresa. I don't know how I feel. Let 's not talk of it any more just now, if you would n't mind."

With a blank face, Grace for a little while longer looked straight before her, then went to one window after the other and pulled down the shades, plunging the thousand roses in a melancholy whitish gloom.

When Grace, on the following day, made her appearance in a black dress having folds of shabby crape, Theresa's first emotion was one of surprise. Then, as she remembered, a secret impatience crept through her very healthy blood. She supposed that Grace, sentimental little goose, was signifying, by putting on mourning, her sense of the death of an illusion or of a friendship. But when Grace—whose eyes certainly looked as if she might have wept in the night over a death—when Grace said to her, "You must help me to buy an every-day dress; black is all I have except my wedding things, which I suppose ought to be kept new," Theresa moved on to a different wonder, and only after a good deal of thinking caught an inkling of the queer young creature's scruple. And then she felt still more ironical.

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CHAPTER XII

JESSE BLACK and the other men of the family, Red excepted, betook themselves to business in the morning, democratically, by the street-car. Red drove to it in a shining buggy, drawn by a sleek black mare named Kate, which a spruce young negro named Sam brought to the door punctually at half past eight. Red took a man's delight in Kate, her glossy coat, her long, free stride.

Often, after an early dinner which Grace and he, escaping from the intrusive crowd, had by themselves at a hotel or a club, he would take her driving behind Kate. The days were long and pleasant, the suburbs in flower; the country had that freshness of green which marks the last of May and the first of June. Nothing gave Grace so much delight as those rides, with their miles and miles of sunset, twilight, moon- or starlight; glimpses of ponds, low hills, happy homes, all bathed in poetic evening haze. In the easy silence that fell on them, her love of nature took turns with the other love in lifting up her heart.

They sometimes had quarrels: Clare could not always know, in the tossing of chaff that so largely formed their conversation, what he must not say. Clare was never—or seldom—vulgar when he was

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minded not to be; but something worldly or cynical or conscienceless would now and then escape him, and then there would be the genteel prejudices of his beloved to reckon with. Grace did not find requisite, for assailing him, any of the courage she had needed to oppose Lydia.

The poor boy was touching sometimes, watching her face for guidance as to what he must avoid; touching in his willingness to take blame—anything!—so as to be on happy terms again. Making up was, in fact, so sweet that it was almost worth while to quarrel. He learned from those passages that under her playfulness Grace was always serious, while she found reason to suspect that under his seriousness lay mockery. But if ever their differences caused the flash of a thought in her that just possibly they might not be happy together, she would say to herself: "One does not marry to be happy. One marries to be together." That was it: for better, for worse, together. In the adorable moments of making up, she knew that no faults Clare might have could be so great as the sweetness of being his love.

But some of their quarrels had no reason for them, really, beyond an instinct in Grace—an instinct as old as woman—to resist the domination of the strong young man into whose hand she had surrendered. That the stronger should be master was so obvious as to be inept: a different thing must be pretended for the dignity of the weaker, for the looks of the thing.

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She quarreled with him sometimes—fancifully, gracefully, yet with a grain of acrimony—because, merely, he was he and she was she, and the Amazonian drop in her blood drove her to oppose him, bother him, put him in doubt, deny him a facile triumph. For her lover alone, in all the world, the amiable girl reserved a side that was a little difficult, incalculable, and that while keeping him guessing kept him bewitched.

On days when they were to go together to choose a feather or twig, as it were, for their joint nest, he invited her to lunch with him downtown. On the occasion of a painting to decide upon, she arrived at the great Overcome Brothers building a trifle before the hour agreed upon. The elevator flew with her to an upper floor; she passed through the ground-glass door which she was coming to know well, and which to-day stood a little way open. Because she could hear Clare talking to someone, and because she was early, she quietly took a seat. The revolving chair before the desk of Clare's secretary stood empty: the woman had gone out, for her lunch, probably. Clare's desk was on the farther side of hers, and Grace could not see him or the man with whom he was engaged.

Business talk being avowedly dull, she reached for the nearest book, a small blue-bound directory, and turned over the pages, but without much curiosity,

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to see which of her acquaintances, her art-school mates, were in it. Any one of those girls meeting Grace now must have wondered at the change she would see in her—to-day particularly, when she was arrayed in a new dress and hat, bought to replace the fair garments which, by a costly scruple, she refused to wear after they had been traced to a source so impure as Sydney Morgan the disloyal: a dress and hat chosen with, among the dim springs of action at the back of the mind, the object of making herself as far as she might into an enchantress.

The color of her dress enhanced the clearness of her cheeks; the velvety shadow of her hat brought out the soft brightness of her eyes. But, more than by hat or dress or the far greater care she took of her person, Grace was changed by a thing with which she had nothing to do: by her glance, which in these days provoked interest—oh, so much more than formerly! It had grown deeper, more unreadable, and with this lovelier.

She laid down her book after a time, concluding that business could not be more dry, and gave her attention to Clare's talk with this man, whom he called Quixy, while Quixy more punctiliously addressed him as Mr. Overcome. The tone of their unmoderated voices was, on one side, vigorous and animated, characteristically that of an Overcome; on the other, a shade extenuating, exculpatory.

A pucker came between her eyebrows before long,

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and the look of an enchantress left her eyes, which grew more and more like those of Winfred Ingalis, with his pained, incurable curiosity as to what is wrong with the world and why people gifted with reason and soul will act as they do.

It was a long half hour before the secretary came in, and, seeing Grace, slipped behind the desk to ask her employer whether he knew that Miss Ingalis was waiting.

In an instant Clare came forward with a delighted smile and greeting:

"So sorry to have kept you waiting, dear. Have you been here long? Just a minute, and I 'll be with you."

The large oak-brown, heavily ornate dining-room to which he took her was half empty when they were shown to their little table near a window. By the time the dishes he ordered had been brought, there was but a sprinkling of people left, for it was hard upon two o'clock. They were a little more than half way through the list of good things, chosen by him with a girl's tastes in mind rather than his own, when it struck him that she was more silent than usual, also that she had not shown herself properly hungry. He observed her, and did not fail to perceive the line between her eyebrows which made her resemble her father, though he was not aware of the latter fact or its implication.

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"Grace," he said finally, "is anything the matter?"

She lifted her eyes from her plate and rested them directly on him.

"Yes," she said, after a moment.

After another moment—

"What?" he asked courageously.

There was another pause, during which she was felt to screw up her courage, too.

"The matter is—that I was there while you were talking with Mr. Quixy."

"Well?" he asked, with flawless composure.

"It gave me the feeling, Clare, of listening to a stranger, an entire stranger. It came over me that you, Clare, were at bottom a stranger."

"Little one," he said indulgently, "it is true that I don't ordinarily talk business with you, wherefore there would be novelty in hearing me do it. But I can see you mean more than that. What exactly do you mean, dear? Only—one moment!—let me solemnly entreat you not to let any of the notions you have got out of books run away with you, making you unfair to those who run this world in the only way it can be run."

"Well, then, as an attempt to be fair: listen to the idea I got of the transaction you were discussing with Mr. Quixy, and see if I have got it correctly. Will you be frank? Mr. Quixy is a kind of agent of yours, isn't he?"

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"A kind. He 's a lawyer."

"There stands in Chicago a row of dwelling houses which you have been trying to buy up in order to turn them into a branch store."

"Quite so."

"You had bought them all except one, but the owners of that one asked more for it than you were willing to give. You offered twenty-five thousand, they wanted forty."

"Which was out of the question for a tired old building ripe to come down anyhow."

"Wait. You had given forty apiece for the other buildings in the same block, had n't you?—though you only bought them to pull down."

"True; but that makes no difference—the others were better property. The trouble was, the owner of the house that had been standing out against us was a woman, perfectly unbusinesslike, who had some fool idea of what her house ought to fetch. We were in no particular hurry; we would n't come to her price."

"You offered her twenty-five thousand dollars, but she would n't accept it. She too could wait. But she died, and when the affairs of her children—minors, girls—were taken in hand by the administrator, he was willing to make the sale at your figure. Quixy, your agent, before concluding the affair came to talk it over with you."

"Go on."

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"And you found explicit and emphatic fault with Mr. Quixy—gave Mr. Quixy a startling piece of your mind—for entertaining such a thought as that of buying the house now for the sum offered at first. Gathering that, with the bread-winner of the family removed, ruin stares those poor creatures in the face, you will give ten thousand for it; or just possibly, if the administrator turns out to be sharp enough, you will come up to twelve thousand five hundred—one half the original offer. They are to be informed that if they don't see it, you—as their old house inclines by several inches over the land you have acquired next to theirs—you will sue them; that you will without a doubt win your suit, when their old house will be torn down by order of the court, and the bare price of the land will be all they can hope to get. Clare, have I got this dreadful story straight?"

"Perfectly."

"And—Clare—*you are not ashamed?*"

Sitting opposite, they could look squarely into each other's face. Grace's eyes were searchingly in Clare's eyes, which seemed to her, for the moment, those of an utter stranger. She had never noticed before that he, like Alec, had a cast in one eye—but oh, very, very much slighter than Alec's; it in truth hardly existed at all; it had not existed, absolutely, a moment ago, she could almost have sworn. Clare's eyes were strong, of a blue that she had described as fiery; but at this point of her acquaintance with them they

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were cold instead of fiery, and shut as a porcelain ball.

"Now, Grace," he began quietly, "I ask you to be reasonable and I ask you to be fair. Business methods are what they are. I did n't make them. This that has outraged you to the point of calling me—politely, as is your never failing habit—a robber, is what any business man in this city would have done in my place. Make up your mind that your schoolgirl morality does n't apply to grown-up deals. Sentiment has no place in them. Am I in business for my health, do you think? I am in business to make money. I work hard. The simple world-old principle is to buy as cheap as you can, and sell as dear. The transaction you have described was above-board, perfectly. The thing is a game, my dear girl; both sides know the rules and play accordingly.

"Those people wanted to do us, did n't they? They thought that if they held out we should eventually have to pay what they asked, which is a lot more than the house is worth. And we should have had to, or give up the whole scheme. We should have paid, in that case, exactly thirty thousand dollars more than the thing was worth. They would have made a round thirty thousand out of us. The tables are turned: we shall serve them as they were going to serve us. Only, we sha 'n't make so much. We shall turn a poor twelve thousand five hundred."

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When he stopped, Grace, who had kept her eyes fixed on his while he talked with his unflinchingly on hers drew her glance away, as if with difficulty, and as if it ached from the strain. It fell on her plate, where she saw, as if very far away and unimportant, a mound of strawberries. Her glance slid from those, in a lost, unconscious way, to Clare's hand, where it lay on the table, pinching and releasing the stems of a pair of sugar-tongs: a fine, strong hand, heavy but well shaped. She noted, as having some indefinable bearing on the situation, how, from the point where his powerful wrist vanished inside the wide starched cuff, there crept forward, less and less dense till it stopped at his knuckles, a miniature jungle of black. Her own hand lay not far from his, so fragile by its side—clenched at this moment, with the stress of her mental anguish, around the base of a tumbler.

"Little one," Clare began again, now with gentleness and protest in his voice, "I wish you showed a little more confidence in me! Make up your mind—you can do so without any danger of going wrong—that I 'm all right. You don't suppose a great big business like ours has been built up by crooked proceedings? If there were nothing else—it would n't pay! Say to yourself that, though we might all be crooks at heart, it would n't pay! We have our credit to uphold, our good name to guard. Come!" His voice softened still more. "Don't you think you 've

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been just a little hard on me? You think in such exaggerated terms. Come, now! You know I want you to have just what you want. You know I want to do what you want, be the kind of fellow you want. But your ideas of a man have been gathered from books of poetry, I 'm afraid, O amiable one. Come! Stop thinking hard things of your Beast and pay a little attention to your strawberries. Look at me, Grace."

After a moment of silent refusal, she obeyed. He was smiling; his eyes were again the eyes she knew—knew so intensely.

"Smile at me, Grace," he coaxed.

But this she would not do. She tilted back her head in the pretty overshadowing hat that embodied a very innocent idea of an enchantress, and looked at him meditatively. Grace's upper lip could curve, when it pleased, with a beautiful and very superior scorn. Her air of inveterate good breeding clothed her at all times in his eyes with an effect of pride; when this was turned into a frosty armor from within which she looked at him, lofty, unapproachable, the thing came near to being insufferable. It was vain to seek for the reason why those girlish, gold-brown eyes, of an expression so subtly different from all eyes he had so far gazed into, why that languid rose, her rather colorless but sweetly shaped mouth, affected him at this pass of his life as they did. It was vain to seek for the reason why, just so far as they were pleased to withdraw, he must insanely, insatiably pursue. . . .

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"Smile at me, Grace!" he coaxed, still more pleadingly.

"What is a smile worth?" she loosened the strained bow of her ironical lip to ask, with a bitter inflection.

Red Overcome did not at once answer; nor did he remove his eyes from hers, whether he were trying to read her or offering himself to be read. The silence was sufficiently long to permit the revolving of many thoughts. His answer, when it came, fell slowly:

"It is worth twelve thousand five hundred dollars," he said—and let out a great breath.

Grace's eyelids fluttered; a tide of rose color mounted to her cheeks; the metallic hardness melted out of her eyes. She looked as if on the verge of tears; she looked, when she had taken in his meaning, as if bereft of the power of speech.

As for him, the pleasure of his gesture was rewarding him. He glowed.

"Are you in earnest, Clare?" she could not but incredulously ask, when the knot in her throat untied a little. "Do you mean that you will let those poor things have their twenty-five—"

He nodded assent, "To please you," and continued bending on her a smile that contained no shadow of diplomacy, a glance that disclosed no duality. At the return of softness in her face, he had to curb the impulse to reach for her hand: though all the other guests had by this time left, a waiter was standing

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where he could keep an eye on them. He murmured a word that took the place of a caress.

"Psyche!"

At that name, the tears which she had contrived to keep back forced their way into her eyes. It was not as he excusably supposed, his magnanimity that made her cry—although that, after her great alarm, had brought relief so great that only the shame of being seen to weep in public had saved her from such disgrace: it was that Ida Lamont had been the first one to call her Psyche, and the poignant image of that sweet friend floated before her at the sound, dear and discrowned. While the tears trembled on her eyelids and she strove to look as if they had not been there, a wave of a different sorrow succeeded to the pang for Ida Lamont: it was a passionate regret, a veritable yearning over the yesterdays when she had believed the ideas of honor of the persons she loved to be the same as her own.

The strawberries were like sawdust in her mouth when, to please him, she tried to eat them; and she did not recover that afternoon the blitheness that animated her so often when they were together. She was subdued—and no wonder—by the burden of love and indebtedness, abasement before his magnanimity, contrition for her unjustice. He understood; he was silent and serious too, in sympathy.

So they went to the picture dealers' in whose window he had seen a painting that impressed him fa-

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vorably as a completing ornament for their dining-room. He wished for the corroboration of her taste before making the purchase. This he received almost too easily. She was still absent-minded, he feared; she did not care much, at the moment, what pictures hung on their walls. But here, again, he understood, and did not bother her about it.

Catching at a chance to divert her he led the way into the exhibition room, where a small miscellaneous collection was hung on maroon walls under coolly showering light.

"Max and Bender's exhibitions are usually very choice," he encouraged her to take an interest.

Her eyes, after one vague circling glance that brushed marines, sunsets, snow scenes, bright large fishes on a platter, stopped on a selection that seemed to him at first sight nothing but queer—unusual to the point of being queer. His natural quickness of perception was shown by his recognition of that picture as the one of all in the room which his well educated beloved would be sure to take to. It represented a friar, monk, hermit, or some such thing, on his knees at the feet of a kind of spirit, saint, vision, or ghost—a spindling female in white, unearthly pale, ethereal. He bent forward at Grace's side to try to make it out.

"What do you suppose it is?" he asked.

"It is Saint Francis and his bride, Poverty," she answered, after a suspense that could be attributed to uncertainty.

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"Oh, is it?"

He examined it more minutely.

"Grace!" he exclaimed with animation. "That white lady has a kind of look like you! Do you notice it? What a funny coincidence. Who painted it? Nothing but initials. 'A. D.' That does n't take us very far. Wait a moment. I 'll go and find out, and the price. I guess we 'll have to have this, Grace."

She remained gazing at the picture in a wonder that affected her heart-beats: they had slowed and thickened; they seemed to burn. She decided, with very little weighing of the question, not to reveal the fact that she was acquainted with the painter. It would infallibly be supposed that he had been in love with her.

Clare came back disappointed.

"Too bad. It 's by a young artist named Dane. The man says it 's not for sale."

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CHAPTER XIII

WHEN you love a great deal, you must be ready to forgive a great deal. You must listen to the heart rather than take counsel from the head. Love is very mysterious, but love is always right—that is to say, if it be great enough, if it be one of those deep loves that surge from below the deepest that is in you.

When it is such, you must take the one who is lord of the pulse that is lord of your breast once and for all as your share in life, to go through fire and water with—or for.

If a thing he does or says outrages your conscience, you must love so much and in such a way that you can make him see that he is wrong; on the other hand, you must confess it when you are in the wrong yourself.

You must be saved or lost together. To be lost for love—would it not be, after all, a kind of salvation?

All minor things must go over the board, yea, be melted out in the great flame of love whose supreme right every drop of the sincere and primitive blood attests. . . .

And the tenets of this evangel must be said over

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and over by the faithful, must be clung to amid seas of doubt, as if to an anchor that has its hold on the eternal rock foundations of the world.

Such meditations as these went on behind Grace Ingalis's brown eyes when they looked merely a little absent, fixed on a flower in the wall-paper, or motes in a sunbeam, or sometimes, it is feared, the faces of persons who were talking with her.

She formed theories of love to furnish a basis for peace of mind. For each person in the world, she decided, there exists one other who belongs with him, and with whom destiny in secret and indirect ways works all the time to conjoin him. Falling in love, as it is called, is not a matter—not at all!—of contiguity, opportunity, youth and the favorable hour, but of things appointed from the beginning, souls making their way through infinite obstacles to the single goal, and recognizing each other when met by the sign of the right ardor. This thought gave dignity, justification, to the tender exchanges of love-making.

How to account in such a scheme for the lovers who gave their hearts where there could be no hope of return? The beloved in their case must be regarded, logically, as a temporary mistake. But if one admitted the possibility of mistakes, must not one admit that two reciprocating each other's passion might be victims of an illusion?

The truth was that when one began to inquire among such terribly recondite things, and tried to

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read rules into the manifestations of life, one ended in a fatal maze.

Andreas Dane! How curious to think of him, who occupied in her life so small a place, remembering her face so accurately. If he were one of those unhappy hearts turned from the true course by an unrewarding fancy, she sent him a message of utter kindness for his consolation. She visualized this as a bird lighting on his window-sill and singing to him an enheartening song.

It seemed strange to her, all the same, that he should have cribbed her idea for a composition, made a picture under his own signature from, patently, her pastel sketch submitted on the screen at the art school. She had not supposed such things were done.

The outcome of much pondering upon latter revelations was the reflection that if a person who is not exactly scrupulous is magnificent, there is more to be hoped from him than as if he were of a hair-splitting conscientiousness, yet incapable at the great moment of splendor and excess. A person disposed by his nature to the latter may learn the former—through influence may be molded and led. The one to furnish that influence would naturally be the woman he loved.

Words could never do it: words would be odious. Neither could it be done, she feared, by the speechless communications of mere proximity. It could be done only by allurement, fascination. Rather sad to think

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of, after the lofty thoughts upon love in early girlhood: it must be done, in the case of one kind of warm-blooded man,—or not done at all,—by charm, by physical beauty, the eternal feminine leading him on to higher planes through the simple appeal at first of sense.

That was the sort of thing which Theresa, when you pinned down what she said for strict investigation, was saying, directly or indirectly, all the time. "You must make yourself beautiful! You want to keep Red captivated! You must dress to please Red!"

Since it was Theresa, the honest, the normal, the good-humored, who spoke thus; and since it was Red, the big, the kind, the right-hearted, who was in question, one must judge that experience had taught them views which oneself at the same age would recognize as sane.

With all this in mind, and the research after beauty placed before her as a matter of merit as well as pleasure, the young woman was gracefully pliant under Theresa's verdict that she must have a more beautiful dress for the Stokeses' affair in announcement of their youngest daughter's engagement.

"You see, my dear," Theresa said, "I want you to look your very best. It will be your first party of any importance outside the family circle, and, in a way, the publication of your engagement as well as Gertie's.

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I want them to see what a pearl Red has caught. You need n't bother your little head about the expense; the dress shall be my business."

Theresa showed by her interest in this dress the earnestness of her wish to have Red's young lady acknowledged as a pearl. That word—pearl—undoubtedly inspired its style. It was all flowing veils, foam-like, with flashes of lustrous satin, and, to give a touch of color, maidenish forget-me-nots nestling where the great French dressmaker judged they would look most ravishing.

"Stop in my room to let me see you before you start," Theresa bade her on the evening of the party, when the women scattered to dress.

And Grace stopped, as instructed, in the room where the longest mirror dwelt. Theresa, Pinky, Sita, and Rebecca, who were to fill one carriage, stood there, ready to go. Grace could not but notice that their ball-dresses, a little tired at the season's end, had been thought good enough for the Stokeses. Theresa made her stand in the middle of the floor and slowly turn.

Grace grew aware of such an intensity of interest on the part of the three besides Theresa who watched her as did not seem to her, really, quite warranted, and she smiled to signify it. She blushed under their eyes, then with a timid boldness threw back her drooping head, a little overweighted by the hair which she had arranged, as Ida Lamont had taught her, in such a way as to make it more voluminous without

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its appearing less massive. Theresa ran her eye over her, from shiny top to shiny toe, and nodded.

"You 'll do, I guess!"

To carry farther her idea of pearliness, she placed in Grace's hand a pearl-sticked fan, painted with white doves and white roses—a contribution of Red's, she said.

As Grace, full of pleasure, spread this before her to see the effect, she beheld at the same time a reflection of Rebecca watching her with a disdain so deep that the sight of it checked her breathing. But Grace's mood to-night was not quarrelsome. Her eyes gave to the glowering eyes in the mirror the soft answer that is said to turn away wrath. "Why do you hate me?" they asked. "I am so willing to be friends!"

Shut in the coupé with Clare, she was first of all kissed—a ceremony by which the joy of being alone together was punctiliously celebrated. Right after it:

"I have something for you in my pocket," he said.

"Oh, Clare!" she protested. "You must n't be always giving me things, dear! When you know I shall never make any return: never embroider for you any of those lovely suspenders which more talented ladies make for the gentlemen they esteem, nor a smoking-cap, nor Berlin wool slippers."

"London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady! Which had you rather have—or a string of pearls?"

"A string— Oh, Clare!"

It was not so dark in the coupé but she could see

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its long white gleam as he drew it from his waistcoat pocket.

"Let your wrap slip back a little," he said, "so I can clasp it on. There!"

"Oh, I can feel its weight, Clare. It is like the soft, cool touch of a hand."

"Let me be poetic for once. May the bonds I shall lay on you, sweetheart, be no heavier and no less *dear.*"

"Oh, Clare!" sighed Grace, and, overtaken by a desire to cry, pressed her cheek against his coat.

Each had been rather anxiously tender toward the other of late. Her impulse had been to hide her eyes against his shoulder to shut out the fears he himself had created; his effort, to efface the impressions causing those fears. He surrounded her now with his arms, and in the silence she felt again how below all such trivialities as thoughts and reasons lay the strong tie of the simple-minded, old-fashioned heart binding her to this one man out of the millions of men.

It was on her lips to say, "Let us not go to the party at all! Tell the driver to take us into the moonlit country instead," when the lips on her hair whispered: "I want my pearl of girls to be the queen and the belle this evening. I want to wear her like the jewel of my good fortune!"

When Grace entered the Stokeses' drawing-room with Clare and Theresa, it seemed to her that a hush

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fell, and that all eyes were for a moment turned on her.

An absurd thought crossed her mind: "Is it possible that I am lovelier than I had ever suspected?" Then she bethought herself of her dress, her fan, her necklace, and placed the glory where it belonged.

The fiancée whose betrothal was sociably solemnized that night was the young sister of that Harvey who had hopes of winning Rebecca. Grace had seen her before, as well as the happy young man. But the older Stokeses, the parents, were strangers to her. The eye could easily find them: they stood with the rest of the family, aligned—according to the stiff manner of formal occasions—and "receiving" in front of a mantelpiece banked with roses, as was the fireplace below.

As Grace and Clare approached, a jostle occurred, then a break, in the row of smiling, handshaking persons arrayed there—caused by one of them sharply facing about and escaping from her post, while the others turned their heads for the briefest moment to look after her. Grace saw vanishing in the farther drawing-room the back of a golden head above a neck and shoulders of rose-misted marble rising from a bodice of black. The small episode had, to her scant attention, the commonplace look of an impulsive person reminded of some such thing as a gas-jet left flaring near a blowing curtain.

A band of Neapolitan musicians in an operatic

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rendering of their native costumes were picking the strings of mandolins and guitars amid the luxurious greenery of the bay-window. From time to time they sang; but their song was drowned by the chattering of the people, who at need raised their voices so as to be heard above the dulcet strains.

"You are a vision to-night! You are a dream!" Clare bent his head to breathe in Grace's ear, as they looked for seats near the music and the open windows. And Grace, uplifted, inspired, bloomed and radiated as she never had before.

The reflection of something unusual was in the face of Alec, when he crossed the room to join her—as Clare was leaving her side to respond to the greeting sign of an old friend whom he wished to bring over for introduction to her.

"Well, Grace!" Alec said—she always winced at his calling her Grace, though she would have said that it was correct enough and she had no objection. "Are you accepting compliments this evening? You have mine! You can have me!"

As room had been made in the middle of the floor for a little dancing if the young people cared about it, and as the piano, taking their work away from the Neapolitans, had struck up a waltz, he asked her to give him that dance.

But Grace shook her head and said it was too warm, whereupon Alec, seeking no farther for a partner,

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took the fan out of her hand, and with an air of gallantry devoted himself to fanning her.

Junior, wearing on his face the same look as his brother, of following the lead of a light, responding to the power of a spell, came to ask her, rather unimaginatively, how she was getting along. Junior never ventured to call her anything but Miss Ingalis. Both youths seemed to her to-night rather nicer than she had lately thought them. Nature has had the justice to arrange that the visible melting of the masculine being under the fire of beautiful eyes should touch to sympathy the beautiful eyes. Junior, too, asked her to dance; but she answered him as she had answered Alec.

When, therefore, Clare returned and asked the same thing, though she wished very much to dance with him, she repeated the excuse she had made to his nephews. The nephews had discreetly melted away when they saw Red returning. He only laughed and held out his hand for hers. Hoping that the boys would understand, she rose and rested her bended arm on his shoulder, and was floated away on the tide of the waltz.

Few were dancing—it was in truth too warm. Seeing before long that they were the only couple on the floor, Grace would have liked to stop; but the impulse of Clare's arm resisting hers swept her along, round and round, strongly and smoothly. People were

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watching them—she could feel it. She also felt that this was an evening of triumph for her. Clare's face declared it, and, conscious of herself through him and the glances following them as slender and light-footed, graceful and luminous, she yielded herself with a happy abandonment to the arm which, as the music kept on and on for their sakes and her strength began to fail, carried her almost bodily over the floor.

When they stopped with the last chord, there was a patter of hand-clapping; Theresa led it.

"Clare, do tell me, if you can, who that lady is over there?" Grace asked, while they were resting where the June breeze could puff in on them through the parted curtains. "Don't turn for a minute; she is looking in our direction. I have found her looking at me several times, as if she were someone I ought to recognize; yet I can't remember ever seeing her before. I mean the very beautiful one, with gold hair and a black dress, a crimson rose at the edge of her corsage."

Clare turned with the right circumspection and air of carelessness. After a second, turning again, he asked in a tone of disdainful disparagement: "Do you call that beautiful?"

Grace's eyes widened. "Don't you?" she asked.

Then she perceived that she had fallen into a trap: this was one of Clare's jokes, a way of being complimentary to her by pretending not to admire any other woman, by not condescending to consider any style of

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beauty but her own. But when Clare went on, it really sounded as if he were serious.

"Can't you see? She 's painted. And she 's laced. And I 'd be willing to bet money God never made her hair that same splendacious gold color."

"Oh, Clare!" said Grace, unable to repress her surprise, "do you honestly think that? To me it looks so exactly right and natural!"

"I love your innocence, my love! Come, you ought to make her acquaintance. She 's one of the family. Mrs. Fenn, divorcée, Harvey and Gertie's sister, the Stokeses' eldest daughter."

The lady in black, seeing them approach, waited, statue-still. A sister of Venus, was Grace's classification of her. She had the hair of burnished gold, the sapphire eyes, the flower-fair skin, pink and white, the soft roundness of form, the charming clearness of feature, that painters from of old have lent to the Sea-born. Her face had literally no fault.

"How can anyone look at me while she is there?" thought Grace, sincerely, and not without a pang. She saw herself as a goose-girl standing face to face with a goddess. But in this she was not just to herself. She was not beautiful in the same sense of the word as Mrs. Fenn; but the fact proved, somehow, no inferiority. No person of discernment would have thought of comparing them: nature, when she made the two, had so perceptibly not been trying for the same end. Grace was pallid, toneless, glimmering,

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effaced, beside Mrs. Fenn's direct and pointed perfections; but Mrs. Fenn was as obvious as the red rose she was wearing by the side of Grace Ingalis, with her little air of soul.

When Clare had made the presentation, Mrs. Fenn said:

"So this is the young lady."

"This is the young lady," said Clare.

"Congratulations—congratulations. I—I have not seen you since your voyage to the West Indies, Clarence. It—it did you all the good you hoped—as I can see."

"All the good in the world. Yes, you behold a cured man. You remember, little one,"—this to Grace,—"that it was because of nerves in danger of prostration I had cut loose from business in midwinter and was traveling on the *Pretoria*. I forget now that I ever had nerves"—this again to Mrs. Fenn. "Eat, sleep, transact business, dance, and am by way of getting married."

"Once more, my dear friend, congratulations—congratulations, with all my heart," said Mrs. Fenn. Her voice had faded on the last syllable. She bit her lip, and pressed a hand over the place of the just mentioned heart, while the shoulders of rose-misted marble heaved as if at a sharp pain.

Rebecca, who with Harvey had been standing near, watching her from behind, was at her side with a spring; she put an arm around Mrs. Fenn and drew

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her away, the latter gasping a little. They passed under the arch dividing the drawing-rooms, and reached a sofa, around which a group quickly formed.

Grace turned an astonished and afflicted face toward Clare. He looked excessively quiet, ironically untroubled.

"She 's such an actress!" he muttered, in reply to Grace's questioning face; in his mustache, with fiercer disgust, he grumbled: "She 's such a liar!— You need n't be alarmed, Grace. Come away. Let 's go and sit down."

Rebecca passed them hurriedly.

"What 's the trouble?" Clare asked carelessly.

His niece gave him a look of black hate and condemnation that included Grace.

"I 'm going to her room for smelling salts."

Clare's ironical calm was not shaken.

"Don't be taken in," he said to Grace, not altogether liking the look in her eyes, and wishing to remove the possible idea that he was cruel. "She has n't anything more the matter with her heart than I have with mine. I 've known her for a long time. It 's temper. It 's her way of making herself interesting."

The gaiety of the party was, in fact, not destroyed by Mrs. Fenn's momentary ill turn. She was seen later, somewhat pale, but showing in laughter the magnificent teeth that made of her mouth a crimson rosebud filled with snow, as, standing at the supper-

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table, she ladled punch from a gleaming block of ice, hollowed out and crowned with vine-leaves.

"How beautiful she is!" thought Grace. "How beautiful she is!" She could not help feeling sorry for her, liar and actress though she might be. But was she, entirely? Surely she had been in some kind of pain.

So the evening wore to an end. Among the last to leave, Grace followed Theresa to the upper room where their wraps had been left. Turning from the glass after adjusting her scarf, she found Mrs. Fenn at her elbow, so close and unexpected that her surprise partook of fright.

Mrs. Fenn, showing her teeth in a strained smile, was looking at Grace with eyes that appeared black instead of blue, under the writhing line of her eyebrows.

"I did not say good night to you," she said, extending her hand, and when Grace had given hers ground it in a grip that hurt. "I did not congratulate you earlier in the evening. My congratulations were all for Clarence. But you are to be congratulated, too. You are getting a prize, let an old friend of his tell you, who has known him a long time, and pretty well. First of all,"—her beautiful mouth was twisted to a grimace by the excess of sarcasm,—"first of all, so chivalrous! Then—so faithful! True! Tender and true—that 's it!"

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"Be careful, Grace!" came a sharp warning from Theresa.

Grace turned quickly to ascertain what there was to beware of; but the warning had obviously been given to the other woman, at whom Theresa was looking with a frown of wonder and reproof, and who now relaxed her vicious grip on Grace's hand.

"Yes," she laughed—and there was a catch in her laugh, like a sob; "I must be careful, or in my enthusiasm I might bring on another heart attack."

Her hands were laid over the seat of the endangered organ, and, biting her lip as before, she drew in a long breath, as if with difficulty, and turned for the door. Theresa's gaze as she looked after her had the same scornful composure and coldness as Clare's with regard to Mrs. Fenn.

"I can't think what 's got into her!" she said, with a shrug that dismissed an insignificant bother. "I should say she needed a keeper. Has n't she been queer this evening? What she 's got against Red is just some imaginary slight. He does n't admire her, you know, as she is used to having all the men do."

It was a long time before sleep came to Grace. The stimulations of the evening, impressions of music, lights, flowers, faces, talk, stir,—the remembrance of salient events,—were slow to grow confused and fade. The necessity also of lying very still so as not to disturb Sita, who had dropped into sea-deep slumbers,

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helped to keep off sleep. But at last it was there, the dreamless trance of utter fatigue held her bound.

Once in every long while a street-car, the noisier for being empty, would slide rumbling past on the rails before the house; now and then a string of footsteps or of hoof-beats would grow from nothing into noise, and dwindle into nothing again. But in the house all was as still as the grave.

The rays of a street lamp brightening the ceiling made visible the pieces of furniture—the little drifts of clothing laid off by two tired and careless young girls. The light picked out on the dark carpet a pair of slender, high-heeled slippers.

In that darkest, stillest hour of all, which precedes dawn, a small commotion developed in the street, under the open windows: footsteps, a mutter of voices, a stifled protest, a scuffle, a scream—

Grace sat bolt upright, grasping her head. Her heart had jumped and was rushing. . . .

There was nothing more; dead quietness had returned to the street. Grace could not know whether the shriek that had startled her had come from without or within herself—whether, indeed, it had been a shriek and not a lightning-flash or the rending from top to bottom of a curtain.

"I must get out of this house," she said, with a conviction the force of which, there in the oppressive darkness, clenched her hands and locked her jaws. "I must get out of this house!"

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CHAPTER XIV

GRACE and Sita had a quarrel next day, the true cause of it probably being that both were tired from the evening before and enervated by the first hot weather, but the ostensible cause Sita's deplorable lack of reasonableness. It began with her requesting Grace to stop writing and come sit in front of the glass to let her fix her hair like Gertie Stokes's. Grace excused herself and went on with her letter. Sita cared very mildly about the amusement she had proposed, but she had nothing better to do, and felt the urge to use up a little of the nervous fluid surcharging her.

"Who are you writing to?" she asked.

"To my sister," answered Grace, without looking up.

Feeling Sita creep behind her, Grace laid a hand across the sheet of paper, and turned round with a frown that was ominous, had Sita been shrewd enough to see it.

But she laughed out in silly glee: "I don't believe it 's to your sister!" and danced out of reach, in delight over the brightness of her joke.

"If you look over my shoulder, Sita, I shall tear the letter sooner than let you read one word of it."

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"That shows, does n't it? That shows! Ah, Grace! Caught! I 've got to find out who you 're writing to."

"You are warned, Sita; don't come near me. It 's my day for not caring to be teased."

"Oh, it 's your day. It 's my day for wanting to see what the model girl of the school is like when she loses her temper."

"You will, if you try to read over my shoulder. I have had more than enough of your bad manners."

This was the first time in their close and over-close acquaintance that Grace had dropped a patient playfulness when opposing her room-mate's invasions and impositions. Sita, in an astonishingly short moment, turned sober, gloomily reflective, suspiciously still. It might have been guessed that a new light had, at a word, given to the past a new aspect.

"I suppose it 's an awful strain on you and your good manners right along to live with us and our bad manners," she said.

"Oh, Sita!" broke forth Grace helplessly. "Go away, will you? and let me alone!"

"You 're not any sicker of me, I may as well tell you, Grace Ingalis, than I am of you!" cried Sita, shaken by a sudden tempest. "I 've tried everything to please you. I 've done all I know how. But I sha'n't after this. Wait and see. Now I know how you look on me, I won't be any such fool!"

Grace let her flounce out of the room without a word

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to stop her, then tried to forget the discomfort, the shame of their passage of arms, and center her mind on the business in hand—needless to say, without avail.

The letter which was completed late in the night, and started the following morning on its way to Mrs. Batey Poor, read thus:

"Darling Lydia:

"I am afraid that what I am going to ask you will be a great surprise, and a rather upsetting one. But I feel sure I can make you understand, and that as soon as I have done it you will be willing. Here it is: I want you to send for me. I want you to write as soon as you receive this, and say that you need me and that I must come at once. You must make an excuse, of course. I can't think of anything that would seem important enough except that Batey is dangerously ill. It would be a lie: but you will tell one for me, I know, just as I would tell one if it were to help you and there seemed to be no other way. And now I must explain why I want you to do this, and it will be very difficult to make clear; because, though it is so real and urgent, it is not altogether clear. It comes down to a feeling I have that I cannot go on living in this house. I can't breathe here any longer. I want to get away as much as if it were a prison or a trap. If I could n't get away from it, having the will so strong to do so, it

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would be, as far as I am concerned, the same exactly as a prison or a trap, would n't it? That 's what something inside of me feels, and wants—oh, terribly!—to be free.

"The reason at the back of this feeling is, I think, that I have been so much hurried in this last part of my life. Hurried to the West Indies, hurried into my engagement, hurried to this house, and soon to be hurried into marriage—hurried until something inside of me has shrieked as if it were going insane, for quiet, for time to think, time to see and know what I am about. And those things I shall never find in this house; the influences are too strong.

"Don't think, Lydia dearest, that this is just a mood and that it will pass. It has been growing for a long time. Almost from the first hour in this house I have felt oppressed, out of my element; but I have called it something else and pushed it aside. From the first there have been things that troubled me, but often so nearly intangible that I only blamed myself for not trusting people who were so kind to me. For they have been awfully kind; I could n't half tell you the kindness that has been shown me, particularly by Mrs. Vawter—besides, of course, her brother Clarence. They shower kindness on me, in gifts, in pleasures, every way. Then, in spite of it, something will come up to make me feel that I don't understand them, not any of them; that they are strangers—even Clarence, sometimes. Their eyes affect me like shuttered win-

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dows. Without seeing into their minds enough to judge of what they are, I feel at those times that they are different from me, from us, from Papa and Mama —different enough to give me the queerest feeling of an abysmal gulf.

"Then all that will pass, and it will seem as if I had dreamed it. But it comes again at something else they say or do, till I have moments of not being sure of anything in this world. Then, there have been incidents—small things, but that put me on the alert—showing that there is more to discover behind and under what appears, which I have the conviction I should not find out by any asking.

"You must see from all this why it is I want you to send for me. If I remain here, in the middle of September I shall be married to Clarence. I shall have no choice—that is all there is to it—if I remain in their house. Now, I wish and hope to marry him; but I want to have a choice. I don't want to marry him while there are moments when I feel him to be a total stranger. And so, at the thought of remaining here to have my will overborne by theirs, or circumstances compel me, I am frightened. But I shall not remain here, therefore need not be frightened—because, thank God, I have my sister, and she will come to my aid. Oh, Lydia, how grateful, how grateful I am that you are there—the one, the only soul in the world I have to turn to!

"Now you will be quick, darling Lydia, won't you?

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You won't let anything delay you. It may n't seem like a matter of life and death—all I can say is that to me at this moment it is one. Oh, I *implore* you not to lose a minute, dear, because I shall have to play a part while I am waiting, and I am not good at it, besides hating it dreadfully.

"With all the love in the world,

"Your own GRACE."

On that same day she went to the bank and drew out what money she had left, so as to be ready to start, if necessary, at night. In covert ways, imperceptible even to Sita, she prepared facilities for swift departure. It seemed to her that every eye brushing her must detect something unusual in her face, her manner; but no one made any reference to it.

She had figured out as closely as she could the number of days and hours that must pass before she could hear from her sister, unless Heaven should inspire her to telegraph. . . .

She was not to be disappointed. Punctual as trains and mail deliveries, punctual as Lydia, the letter came.

Grace took it to her room for privacy. Sita, dramatically cool and distant in her manner toward Grace, had taken her paper novel outdoors, to read in the shadow of the elm. With the letter actually in her hand, Grace felt with greater emphasis the huge difficulty of the task before her: a comedy to play convincingly—such a poor actress as she was! But if

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anyone were told he must pretend or be shot, it seems likely he would make shift to pretend. Since she absolutely must, she should get courage and art from somewhere. It was the hour, if ever, for valor: that quality with which her father had desired so strongly to arm her, in provision for the time when he should no longer be there.

She tore open Lydia's letter. She read:

"My dear Grace:

"I cannot imagine what you are thinking about! Your letter sounds to me quite mad! What is the matter? Nothing you tell me gives me any idea but that you are nervous, overwrought, fanciful, and have worked yourself into a panic. I have been told by Batey of an experience not uncommon to clergymen—that the bride at the very ceremony, instead of saying yes, will say no. It always turns out to be a case of nerves: the overwork, the excitement of getting ready to be married, affects them that way. After a day or two the couple—who usually belong to low life—come back to the parson, the bride hanging her head and heartily ashamed of herself.

"Now, my dear little sister, I believe your case to be similar. It can be read in every line of your letter. There is not one real complaint you have to make or reason you have to give. If I should fall in with your plan, I should be acting like a fool, helping you to ruin your life. Just suppose that to accommodate you I

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should tell the lie you prompt—what would happen? You would come to this out-of-the-way place, hundreds of miles from Mr. Overcome. How would that lead to knowing him better, as you seem to feel it necessary to do before marrying him? The chances are that it would end the whole thing. I don't see him—do you? —giving up business to follow you out here for the sake of gradually surmounting your objections?

"You seem determined to throw away your best chance in life, and I am not going to let you do it. You are morbid, that 's the whole difficulty. Thinking of yourself and your own feelings, you lose all sense of proportion and reality. Your own feelings seem to you now, as they have always done, the most important thing in the world. To indulge a whim, you wish to take a step that will land you in the very same position from which you were overjoyed to be taken a few months ago by the man you now propose to throw overboard, after all his being so kind, as you yourself say, and showering you with presents and pleasures.

"Do please take a moment to look back and remember how discontented and down-in-the-mouth you were. I wish I could show you a picture of yourself as I remember you, to incline you to overlook a few faults in the one to whom you owe your deliverance, and not to expect perfection from mere mortal man.

"Even if I did n't feel so strongly that as a matter of duty I must not comply with your request, the fact

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is that I could n't do it. We have n't a home to offer you. We have hardly had time to turn round yet. We are living at the Foster Poors, as you know, occupying their one spare room. Our things are still in packing-boxes, waiting the time when we shall have found a house to suit us. Batey is in with Foster, and has invested the money. It can't be pulled up by the roots the very minute after it is planted.

"You will thank me for this, Grace, by and by, when you get over the particular fit of blues, or vapors, or megrims, or whatever it is that is queering your vision of things. You will see the matter exactly as I do, and own that I was right. In that certainty, I am reconciled to being regarded temporarily as a cruel monster. I am, nevertheless,

"Your devoted in the right sense'

"SISTER LYDIA."

When Grace had finished, she pressed a hand to her forehead, then to her throat, in the futile way of persons for whose emotions the event is literally too large. The air trembled with a tatter of laughter, accompaniment to a remark that did not find its way into sound:

"And I have been objecting to the people around me because of their moral vulgarity!"

But, with time to think, Grace got a better grasp on herself. A spark dawned in her eye, which grew to be hot and steady: a signal-light with which Winfred Ingalis would not have been dissatisfied.

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CHAPTER XV

GRACE had preferred a summer theater, this evening, to a drive; and after it had asked to be brought home, instead of being taken for an ice. The lover felt defrauded, and, with the aversion to parting for the night which marks the heartily in love, coaxed Grace to come with him to the dining-room, where he, being famished, would find himself a bite.

The house was in darkness but for one high-hung jeweled lantern in the hall. Theresa had gone to Jaffa Road to look after the bothersome things connected with opening the house, and had taken Pinky and Sita with her; they were spending the night. The rest had very likely gone to bed, or the young men had not yet come in; the servants were not required to sit up, so it was a silent as well as dark house into which Clarence let himself by a turn of his latch-key.

Through the door at the end of the entrance-hall they passed into the gallery encircling the rotunda, hollow and dimly vast, with the hall light making only just visible the clusters of gigantic pearls that were its unlighted lamps. She followed the curving line of his course to the dining-room door, and stood till he

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had lighted up. With a tinkle of clashing prisms, the room flashed into brilliancy.

Clarence placed a chair for her.

"Now wait a moment. I know how I can disappoint the cook: I 'll find where she has hidden the cold duck."

He came back grinning with the look of a big school-boy successful in some unlawful foray, and carrying the platter of duck.

He found crackers in the dining-room cupboard; he found glasses, and filled them with a sweet Tokay—for her sake, for he did not much like sweet wines. Then he seated himself near, helped her, and fell to.

"I told you, Clare, that I was n't hungry," she reminded him, when he showed concern because she was not doing her share.

"To please me!" he said, offering a tempting bite at the end of a fork—and was again so like a school-boy that she took it. Then he offered his glass to her lips, to christen. She shook her head; but, as he pressed it, looking his self of their best hours, she took a sip—and thereupon unbent a little, as it seemed to him, whose eyes, while amorous, were both watchful and keen.

They chatted while he devoured a healthy young man's supper, she appearing a little tired, and with it, he felt as always, the more interesting. The shadows darkened around her eyes when she was tired, and her tired smile was doubly enchanting. When, with her

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elbows on the table and her head thrown back, she looked at one thoughtfully yet absently between her lashes, and seemed far away in a dream whither ordinary man could not follow, would one not have liked to crush her like a cluster of grapes into a goblet, then drink it dry, to find out what the baffling girl's inwardness, her essence, was really like?

There had been a silence between them of a minute or two, when Grace, for the first time that evening, spoke unspoken to. Her voice was peculiarly quiet and arresting.

"Clare, I want to go away," she said.

He looked at her with instantaneous solicitude, but took a moment before speaking to observe her.

"I have been afraid you were getting over-tired, dearest. I 've been noticing it now for several days. We are such husky fellows in our family, we overdo the year round and never feel it. But you 're different, it won't do for you to overdo. It 's my fault; I ought to have guarded you better. Well, sweetheart, there are only two weeks and a little over to wait, and we shall be going away. It 's nice at Jaffa Road—you 'll see, Grace, you 'll like it. You can be outdoors the whole day long—big, shady piazzas, hammocks. Then, there 's the beach—crowded or solitary, as you prefer, according to the part of it you choose. The girls sit on the sands by the hour. I get down at about four. I 'll take you sailing on the *Inez Second*

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—dandy boat. We 'll ride horseback, too; I 'll teach you. We 'll—"

Grace interrupted him, speaking in the same composed and steady voice:

"I don't want to go to Jaffa Road, Clare."

"Not Jaffa Road?" His tone and face expressed a certain wonder. "You think, do you—? Where should you like to go, then, dearest?"

"I want to go to Florida, to my sister Lydia."

Clare watched her in silence, while trying to get his bearings among new and unmapped lands. He brusquely laughed.

"No, maid of many and curious inventions, find a better one! Don't tell me you 're homesick for Lydia —not for Lydia and Batey! No!" he crowed. "No, I insist. I see what it is. It 's my family that you can't stand. You 're right. *Are n't they swine?*" he came out with comic violence. "I know all about them, and understand why you—O princess that could n't sleep on twenty mattresses over one pea—should find them sickening to live with. Tell me, have they—has any one done anything in particular to you? Anything spiteful? Rebecca 's the damndest of them all! Has she annoyed you? But Alec 's a poisonous ape, too. Just tell me, Grace, and I 'll wring their necks. Now I 've frightened you. Oh, I 'm a beast, like the rest. Don't I know that you would n't make a peep of complaint, you polite angel, if they put pins

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in your pillow and red pepper in your pie. You 've not accused them, but I 'm informed. And now, dearest, what is there we can do? If you don't think you could manage to stick it out until the middle of September, all I can see for it is that we should bring the date of the wedding nearer. What do you say to that?"

"I don't want the wedding-day brought nearer. Just the other way, Clare—I want it put off." At the look he gave her, of slowly growing, dismayed astonishment, she changed her tone to one not so dry and firm; she trembled with earnestness: "Oh, can't you see, Clare—can't you feel—that we don't know each other well enough to be married so soon? Don't you realize how little, in any true sense, you know of me?"

He let out a sound of relief, and looked himself again. He copied her posture: leaning his elbows on the table and his chin on his clasped hands, he watched her with sparkling amusement.

"All I need to know about you, O graciousness, O goodness, is that you are sweetest-scented little prickly rose, the most mellifluous little pecking canary, that I have ever met. If I am ready to marry you on that, what objection have you to make? But if you imagine that I don't know you. . . . I know you, my lady, a heap better than you think. You look so artless and you 're so sly, so simple and you 're so deep, so meek—when you 're really a vixen. You have, in fact,

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O Miss! O modesty! with all your refreshing innocence and delicate air, the makings of a most awful little flirt. With this coming on, then drawing off, this inviting, then repulsing, making yourself scarce, making yourself precious, warm one minute, cold the next, refusing your lips every single time and having to be prevailed upon all over again, full of more fancies than the most acrobatic imagination can flap after—if you wanted to make sure that your slave and victim would never escape you, or let you escape from him, you could n't have taken a safer line."

Grace had become deeply quiet again.

"In every word you say you are proving, you see, that what I said is true: that you don't know me at all. If you did, you would know that it is the simple truth that I want to go away. Be serious, Clare, and listen, and believe what I say, no matter how much it astonishes you. I want to go away for the sake—precisely—of being far from you—yes, from you. Whether for a long or a short time, I can't tell. But I want to be away from your domination, your atmosphere, until I can get back possession of myself; until—can't you see?—I feel my soul my own—very likely to give myself over again, but in any case to do what I do from my own free will."

"Now, what the— Well, well, that *is* a point of view! Something, of course, has happened to put you in this frame of mind—sitting there talking to me like a little book of metaphysics. What is it, Grace?

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Have I done something to offend you? The measure of the extent to which I try not to, little one, it 's not likely that you 'll ever get. The way I 've looked out for my language, my manners, my morals, since I 've known you, it would soften a marble image to contemplate. Now, just tell me what I 've done wrong. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I have told you," came from Grace. "I want you to let me go."

He had a laugh for her solemn obstinacy.

"Ah, no, Psyche, girl with the lamp! If you propose to go off by yourself and think me over in cold detachment, you can say to yourself with a conviction like rock that it won't be because I 've consented and held the door open for you to pass. . . . What ridiculous stuff all this is, my pet!" he blustered in desperation. "Did you tell me there was insanity in your family? In your priggish moments you may want to dissect and classify the sentiments that bind us together; but if you have the astounding hardihood to intimate, at this time of day, that we were not made for each other, I have just one answer for you. No, no, the gesture with which you shoo an obnoxious bumblebee won't do. I never in the world could have made you care for me if I had been a woolly lamb. . . . Grace, incomprehensible child," he burst forth in a new and poignant voice, "what makes you want to break my heart?"

She did not struggle in his arms, because they were

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too hopelessly strong. She withdrew herself from the surface that his lips pressed, and offered such blankness as might have discouraged one less fixed of will. But him her deadness incited to try the more to bring her to life, to warmth. That he could make her feel how much he loved her better than he could tell her had been his pertinent thought. Between the kisses with which he smothered her cheeks and unresponding lips, he murmured the fond things bubbling from a deeply stirred heart. He held her away from him, finally, to scan her little impassive face for some hopeful sign. It looked—pure and waxen—like the mask of one at once suffering and asleep. Tears hung at the edge of her lashes.

Again he brought her close, and kissed her tears.

"You don't want to go away from me, do you?" he whispered, moved to the verge of tears too. "Aren't you as much mine as I am yours?"

She nodded very faintly and her lips shaped a soundless "Yes."

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CHAPTER XVI

GRACE was grateful that night for Sita's absence, which permitted her to toss at will in the bed and weep at liberty. When, tired out, she slept, it was not to escape altogether from trouble. The face that had pursued her since her first sight of it, making itself the starting-point of confused threads of surmise and their dependent emotions, obtruded itself in her dreams—with a great deal of its beauty gone, but its individuality accentuated to the point of caricature. In this distorted version, Mrs. Fenn stood forth intensely unpleasant amid the fantastical composites of a perfectly convincing dream-world, and, while railing like a mad-woman, worked her features so that they alarmingly melted from one shape into another, like reflections on agitated waters. Grace was afraid of her, so violent and menacing as she appeared, till something whispered that she need only waken to escape; thereupon the dream transferred her to a grove of tall pines, where all the sound to be heard was a squirrel angrily chattering from a branch on which he sat jerking himself as he tore a pine-cone to shreds.

When she awoke, the image of Mrs. Fenn returned

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at once, as she was actually remembered, beautiful as the masterpiece of some Greek carver of Aphrodites, or else a rose that could be imagined self-convinced of its perfection. Many and mixed as were her sentiments with regard to Mrs. Fenn, and some of them sharply, intuitively inimical, Grace felt no proper scorn for the woman's unbraced conduct, lack of dignity and good taste; they affected her like those of a child whom some misfortune, such as being too ailing to punish or too pretty to scold, robbed of indispensable discipline, so that it could never rightly grow up. With the fury of pain in Mrs. Fenn's voice still present to her, Grace felt sorry for the other Grace, felt outraged in her deep sense of what should be by the treatment she had seen her receive.

From a long, late sleep she woke unrefreshed and unnerved, asking herself, in despair at her size by comparison with the size of her problems: "What—what shall I do?"

To take advantage of a circumstance which might not recur—that of Theresa and the girls being away from home—seemed to her, amid boundless uncertainty, one thing obviously to be done, whether she should afterward decide to leave or to remain. Unbothered by any person asking whither she was going or what she meant to do, she went out to procure a time-table for Florida and to make inquiries concerning the journey to Welaka.

Sita entered the room, in the afternoon, with a

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happy air of having enjoyed herself; she hummed while putting her hat and things into their places. She had not forgotten that she was playing a comedy of grand indifference toward her erstwhile "crush." Grace was tempted to do her part then and there toward making up. To live in the same room with one who regards herself as offended by you is burdensome, from the necessity it brings of a constant and vain attempt not to care. Moreover, to have a person who gave you affection, such as it was,—inconsiderate, cloying, over-familiar, messy,—show marks of antipathy instead is permitting something, after all, less good to be substituted for what was not excellent to begin with. Grace was very near surprising her room-mate by an act of humility, an apology, an appeal. But flesh and blood at the critical instant rebelled. She would have Sita at once around her neck, on her hands, in her hair again. She took a less dangerous step: that of shaking herself sufficiently free from her cares to show a friendly interest in the jaunt to Jaffa Road; to act, in the endeavor to restore pleasantness between them, as if nothing had happened to mar it.

Sita's attention was arrested, like that of a dog at a suspicious footfall. She gave Grace as sharp a look as her big, shining calf's eyes were capable of, but resolved not to see what she saw, not to surrender anything like so easily. She was taking a good deal of pleasure in her part of the play.

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When she rose with the others from the dinner-table, Grace, fearing that to go at once to her room would subject her to questioning, went, for the first time since taking up her abode with the Overcomes to the piano that stood in the crypt, out of the way of the dancers when there was dancing. It was strewn with Rebecca's music, which she slowly looked over and none of which she knew. Rebecca was going for a buggy ride with her beau, as he was designated by the family, Harvey Stokes, even as Clare had wanted her, Grace, to do with him. She sat down at the piano and began to play, as evidently as possible for herself alone, making the least noise compatible with playing at all.

After a little of it, Alec, in his shirt-sleeves, came to the door of the den, a billiard cue in his hands, a pipe between his teeth.

"Oh, it 's you, Grace. I was wondering who the deuce— No, go on, go on; I like it."

Junior came to the door, too, in his shirt-sleeves likewise, and likewise smoking. The brothers neglected their game of pool to stand listening for a while. Theresa leaned over the gallery railing to call down:

"Beautiful! But you do play the dolefulest music I ever heard!"

On such warm evenings the men took their cigars to the glass doors wide open on to the green yard. Red sat with them to-night, not so far from the piano

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but that he could watch the face of his incalculable love who was not being nice to him.

Zip had scented something in the fact of Grace's unsmiling air and this sudden fancy for piano-playing, as well as from Uncle Red's respectful distance from her. It encouraged her to start a romp around him like those of the old days, full of wild laughing, and poking, and climbing over his person, and whispering in his ear. Her funniest secret caused her such laughter that part of it was spluttered audibly.

"The tune that made the old cat die!" Grace heard, and wondered that even under the circumstances Clare did not resent, for her sake, that joke of the impudent little thing. However unreasonably, it hurt that he did not.

Bluish transparent darkness was deepening outdoors. In the rotunda the darkness was gray, save where a red glimmer came from the den. Grace could let the tears come into her eyes without danger of being seen.

At last Clare drew a chair close, and leaned on the piano, giving his full attention to her shadowy face.

"What is that you are playing?" he asked, in a voice whose every inflection was an entreaty to be friends with him again.

"It is Schubert's, and called 'The Inn.' It is really meant to be sung," she answered, with well simulated indifference.

"Jolly sort of inn, I should call it!" he laughed.

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"But I guess if you were to play 'Yankee Doodle' it would sound soulful."

Tired of the pokiness of sitting in the dark, Theresa, without warning touched a taper to one group of the pearls. Grace's face stood revealed, bathed with tears.

Instantly on his feet and bending over her with all the magnetism of warmth and strength, Red begged: "Come out under the elm with me, won't you, Grace?"

But, though she yearned to be comforted, and comforted above all by him, though the sadness of the whole great universe seemed poured on her in a drenching rain, she shook her head in denial, fearing, more than anything she could imagine of the flames of hell, the torrid Paradise of his embrace.

It seemed to her on the next day that the family must suspect a lovers' quarrel. How could they fail to?—when she, so contrary to precedent, avoided to be alone with Clare. The only sign, however, from Theresa, and that a doubtful one, was an opportunity she took to tell her what extraordinary luck she was in to get such a husband. Red, said Theresa, was a fool, he was so generous in quarters where he loved. Nothing too good to give, nothing too much to do. And wasn't he good to look at? She only wished that Heaven had not made her Red's sister, or else had made a few more men like him. No reason why

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you should ever have the smallest difficulty with Red, if you understood him and used a little tact.

Grace showed some degree of tact in her manner of receiving this implied advice. She was not impelled to let Theresa into the secret of her difficulties, and listened like any engaged girl well satisfied with the change of state before her.

It was a long, soul-wearing day to live through, with a heart unremittingly burning amid the desperate difficulty of—not only not knowing what were best to do, but not knowing what at bottom she wished to do: a confused battle going on between desires, suspicions, conscience, cowardice, and then the simple ache of yearning created by the love potion of which she had drunk.

Red asked her again to go driving with him, go to a theater, go for a walk—anything! He asked it with a beseeching, reproachful face. She refused, and felt ridiculous when she again, to give herself a countenance by doing something, seated herself at the piano to play her mournful melodies.

Red turned testily away from her, and repaired to the den to play pool with his nephews. He could be seen through the doorway in his shirt-sleeves, chalking his cue—so different he was from the others, the hulking Junior, the graceless Alec! The shirt of fine linen sat well on his athletic shoulders; the flat white collar increased the vividness of his black head and glowing face; he had more than ever an air of manly

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elegance in that undress. A sister's partiality did not in every respect mislead Theresa.

He could be heard now laughing with the boys, in the boisterous way of Overcomes when in the mood. Grace, playing scarcely above breath, tried with a tormenting interest to hear what he said. But so much nearer to her were the tiresome other men, smoking their thick cigars by the open door. When she strained for Clare's voice, she was severely tried by hearing their droning business talk instead. Until her ear was caught by a name occurring in that conversation near the door: "Quixy." After that her attention to what Black and Sim were saying became so complete that, forgotten, the hands on the keyboard were still.

While she sat by a window next day, to all appearance reading her book, and while Sita in the same room busily did things to winter clothing in preparation to putting it away from the moths, Grace was saying, in the picture language of internal conversations, what may be rendered as follows:

"If I am to get away, I must go without farewells or discussion. I must leave the house as if on the most ordinary errand, and go instead to the railway station and take my train. As soon as I am far enough away, I will send back a letter to explain. I shall take with me a bundle so small as not to arouse any suspicion. My things will have to stay behind,

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for them to do what they please with. Almost all my latter purchases were paid for in part by Theresa, who has always wanted me to have finer things than I wanted to buy; much of it, therefore, is really theirs.

"Lydia does not dream of the thing that is preparing for her. She thinks me bestowed, for good and all, in the little niche that it was convenient to consider as fitting me. What a blow to her castle of dreams when, unannounced, unexpected, I stand in the door—no ghost, but solid and to be counted with, my own avenger, with steadfast, accusing eyes. The fancy that I am a little pawn to be moved about on the chessboard to serve the ends of other people will cease very suddenly when she sees my face. I feel in myself an actual desire, a flame of battle-lust, for the moment when she learns a new lesson concerning me, discovers a new person in her spineless little sister. She does not want me, but she shall have me, as a penalty for not having quite succeeded in selling me into slavery.

"Poor Lydia! After a while it will be all right. In her own way, she will be a good sister to me again; she has a Christian conscience, and, under everything, affection of a kind for the baby sister of her little girlhood. She is Papa and Mama's daughter, after all, just as I am.

"They will have to make up a bed on chairs for me in the sitting-room, I suppose, at the Foster Poors'. They can't very well turn me into the streets. I won't

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ask for my money back, but I can demand a roof and food till I have found work. I shall not be dainty as to what I am willing to do. There must be children to teach, or old ladies to companion, or places where shop-girls are wanted, or factories where they need hands—at the worst, floors to scrub. Anything, anything, will be more tolerable than to remain where I am."

Having waited till Sita had left the room, she went to her bureau drawer to take and transfer to her pocket-book the money for her journey, which she had left in an envelope beneath a little pile of handkerchiefs. . . .

But the money was no longer there.

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CHAPTER XVII

ON the third evening since the inexplicable turn taken by his love affair, Red Overcome did not expose himself to further refusals. He stayed away from dinner and went to the Athletic Club. There he had purposed to remain till late, but before the evening was old changed his mind and started for home—to see how Grace was taking it. He did not pretend to understand that girl. Who could tell but her cure might be as sudden as her attack? A peace-making before bedtime! It were well to be on the spot.

Hearing sociable sounds as he entered the house, he listened for Grace's voice, or, through the voices and laughing, the notes of her piano. He could hear neither; his spirits dropped flat with the fear that he was already too late, that she had gone upstairs. He damned the whole business.

As soon, however, as he stepped from his room on to the gallery, every one of whose pearls the size of moons was whitely aglow, he saw her, and was convinced in the same instant that she had seen him.

A dozen young people sat distributed in groups over the stairs: a cousin or two from outside were among them, beside Harvey, Gertie, her fiancé, and a friend

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of Harvey's whom Red knew only by sight. The latter, seated near Grace, was making himself agreeable.

A string of "good evenings" and "hellos" greeted Red as he came to stand above the assemblage and look down over them with his smile of a fine fellow. Grace rose at once, as if she had only been waiting for him. In the manner of one who expects to be followed, she drew a few steps apart.

"May I speak with you a moment?" she asked, when he had joined her.

Strolling slowly, they took themselves, with the recognized right of lovers, outside the line of curious and profane glances. Glances curious and profane nearly as many as there were eyes played over their backs as they went. Theresa, who at the sounds hailing Red's arrival had come to the door of the drawing-room, followed the pair with a look of relief and hope.

With strict good taste, Red had never, when Grace entered the parlor that admitted of transfiguration into his sleeping apartment, closed the door. He left it open, as usual; they could not be watched or overheard anyhow, unless by someone coming frankly to the door.

At the weary finality of the gesture with which his sweetheart disposed of his affectionate attempt, Red had a laugh. Instead of appropriate dejection, a look of wicked fun came into his eyes. Without insisting on the toll of a kiss, he ceremoniously placed a chair

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for her, and made it more comfortable by a cushion.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked.

Grace took the edge of her seat; he leaned back at ease in his, and gave her all the time she wanted to come to the point.

"I hate to tell you what I have to tell—" she approached it.

"What 's coming now? But go ahead! I 'm braced for anything!"

"You are mistaken, Clare. It has nothing to do with— I want you first to promise not to tell anybody or make a fuss about it."

"What 's happened?"

"You won't make a fuss about it, will you? I care so particularly. My father impressed it upon me as a child, so that I never can forget, the fact that the moment something is missing suspicion falls on the servants, poor things. It 's such an unfair position to be in, where, no matter how honest you are, the moment anything is missing you feel yourself regarded as a possible thief."

"You 've missed something?"

"I had nearly a hundred dollars in an envelope, Clare, in the top drawer of my bureau. I am certain it was there yesterday, because I counted it over. To-day I looked for it, and it is gone."

"You 've looked carefully, I suppose?"

"Everywhere. Absolutely. Over and over. Would I speak of it without being sure?"

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"Hm. Queer. Very well; I won't make a fuss, but I 'll do what I can to find out who 's got it."

"It 's sure to have been someone from outside, someone who slipped in, perhaps, while we were all at dinner."

"Leave it to me."

Clare smoked reflectively. Grace watched him in a questioning, expectant silence.

"The trouble is," she got out with difficulty, "that it leaves me almost literally without money."

She was looking downward as she said this, in embarrassment. When she stole a glance at him to see why he did not speak, she found him grinning. The deviltry in his eyes required her to view and take account of it.

"Providence," he began in the characteristic manner of his lighter vein—"Providence, O lilies and languors, has come to my aid!"

At the challenge, Grace leaped into the saddle, to joust with the same sort of lance. A belligerent gleam was in her eye.

"Providence, O roses and raptures, has let you in for ninety-seven dollars, which you will please pay to me. I shall be astonished if I am kept waiting."

"Astonishment is good for you, O airy fairy!" He settled back in his chair, looking supremely debonair. "Listen. I will return the ninety-seven dollars stolen from you in my house, of course. But I must be allowed to pay as I can, by instalments—say, five dollars

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a week, which will keep you in postage stamps. That will bring us to—let me see—long past the second week in September, after which what 's mine is yours, and all your little bills—O summit of felicity! Ideal attained! How 's that, Grace?—come in to me."

"Not so fast! Am I to understand that I might have to ask twice—*twice*, O imitation of a prince—for the paltry sum of ninety-seven dollars?"

"O ivory statuette, coolness personified! Some ways of asking are more persuasive than others."

"And some discoveries are more painful, O plaster copy of Apollo!"

"Say no more. That last knock does it. Apollo does it."

Red slapped his pockets, pair by pair, hips, coat, vest, prior to turning them inside out on to the table. He counted the green and yellow paper, the loose silver, the gold lucky piece tossed down with the rest.

"I 'm sorry—it 's only about half. Fifty-two dollars and eighty-five cents. I 'll have the rest for you to-morrow. There you are, little screw! little touch-me-not!"

With an effect of shame in spite of everything, Grace's hand moved toward the money. As it hung like a bird about to alight, Red's hand closed upon it.

"Just a moment. Just one thing. Promise, Grace, that you won't use this money against me."

"Against you? What do you mean?"

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An equal seriousness was suddenly in both their faces.

"You know what I mean. Promise that you won't use it to go away from me."

Grace's hand turned limp within his, and like a hawk with its capture the two dropped together.

"Promise."

"Clare," she said, after a little while given to anxious meditation, "have you ever read a play called 'The Lady of the Sea,' by Ibsen?"

"Ibsen? No, my pretty, not I."

"I wish you had, because it is the illustration of a thing that I shall have trouble to make you see. There is a woman in it who wants to leave the man she 's married to. It is a morbid obsession in her case—a longing to return to the sea. You feel that nothing could have kept her from it, except the one thing her husband finds to do, which is to release her. When she is free to go, the obsession ceases, and she finds it possible to stay. You had much better let me go to Lydia, if I want to."

"Had I? If I do, will you promise to come back? . . . You see? You won't promise. Then how can you expect me to let you go? You don't seem to understand, little one, that it 's a thing I care about."

Grace pulled at her hand; he relinquished it. With both hands, systematically, but as if thinking the while of other things, he rounded the money into a neater pile, and turned a brass bowl over it.

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Something in his action, in the hatefulness of feeling her dependence upon him for disgusting money, stung her to sharp anger. Upon the impulse to hurt back, she slipped his rings from her finger, and laid them on the table.

"You can put these with it."

She had given him the desired shock, unmistakably.

"What do you mean by that?"

But she was already frightened by what she had done.

"Because—because—if the money in my bureau is not safe, these rings may not be safe either on my hand," she explained lamely. "They have grown loose; a thief of enterprise could get them without difficulty."

The eyes trying to read her were those unreadable eyes that made him seem like a stranger. She could not bear to meet them, but looked off among the swords and muskets on the wall, dim in the greenish dusk outside the ring of lamplight.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, in conclusion to his reflections, "and I had better take care of them for you." He placed the rings in his vest pocket.

Her unsuccessful scene seemed to her ended. In humiliation she was rising to go, when he asked sharply:

"That was not a symbol, was it, Grace,—handing me back my engagement ring,—by which you wished me to understand that you are throwing me over?"

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His voice left no doubt of the origin or sincerity of his alarm. Corresponding depths were stirred in her by its vibration. She was brought face to face, like him, with a possibility as dreadful as an amputation.

"Unimaginable—oh, unimaginable, Clare, that it should come to that!" she moaned, and covered her eyes pathetically to shut out the vision of ultimate calamity.

"There spoke my own!" He was all comfort and fondness at once; but in the next moment, through the rebound of his spirits, he overran again with his peculiar fun. "But you are the most unexpected little prize-package, you know! Nothing I 've learned from others helps me to guess right with you. There you sit, gentle and sweet, incapable, anyone would suppose, of hurting a fly. What makes you want to stick spikes in your gorilla? What makes you vivisect your curly dog? You need n't talk to me about that Sea-lady and her mysterious mentality. You 've got something definite against me at the back of your mind which you have n't the fairness to come out with. How *can* I let you go, Grace,"—his voice was plaintive,—"and take my chances of the thing working out right hundreds of miles away? I 'm not that kind of man—you ought to know it.

"Do you know what all this looks like, little girl? what the only explanation is that would really seem to explain? That you 've grown sick of me, so soon.

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But to think that would seem to me equal to the coarsest insult I could frame. I won't let myself. I stick, instead, to thinking of the beautiful past—so recent, too!—when you used to talk about your great task of making me happy—and I laugh a hollow laugh. Grace, I 've got to laugh; I 've got to treat this thing like a spell of weather that will pass; for if I don't I shall be tragic. And if I 'm tragic, if I begin to tell you how you 've made me feel, I shall be ridiculous. I laugh, so as not to do worse. And the jolt came when I thought I was doing so well! I 'd cut out swear words: went around like a blankety school edition. Did you ever hear me sigh one small *h*? Did you ever get a whiff on my breath of anything you should n't? I chewed perfumes I bought of a French barber, if there was any hope of a kiss. Patent-leather shoes! Manicure! Five-dollar ties! Utter respectfulness! Never a squeeze too tight, a kiss too long.

"Then, with regard to matters mental and moral: in our occasional arguments, did n't I always knuckle under before superior wisdom? When you even attacked my way of doing business, did n't I yield? Not a cheap luxury, either, your little conscience—"

"Stop, Clare! I can't let you believe that I believe you really did what you said you would do that time about the Chicago building. You deceived me; I know it perfectly."

Clare's eyes widened, then narrowed, and he gave

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the prolonged exclamation of one finding the key to a riddle.

"Oh! Now I see! That would account for much! But what, my dearest, makes you think I deceived you?"

"I heard Mr. Vawter and your brother Black talking the thing over while they smoked their cigars in the doorway. They mentioned Mr. Quixy's part in the transaction that he had just brought to a satisfactory termination. They mentioned the bargain price paid."

"I see. And you made up your mind, without further investigation, that I was a liar. Have you any idea, my gentle love, how such a line of conduct as you laid out for me would strike three seasoned business men who do not happen to be in love with you? We are partners, you remember, Black, Lonzo, Sim, and I. Just try, by the help of an excellent imagination, to figure it out. That loss of twelve thousand five hundred dollars was, and had to be, my personal loss—and strictly private, let me add. I should n't care to be laughed at as Overcome Brothers—the rest of them—would laugh at me if they came to hear of my tomfoolishness. Quixy is in my confidence, no one else. So you see where your general bad opinion of me leads you."

"Clare, are you willing to give me your word of honor that what you have just told me is true?"

"Will you believe me upon my word?"

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"I shall be forced to."

"Very well, then. . . ."

By an instinctive gesture she stopped him.

"No, Clare! Don't swear it!"

The words were no sooner past her lips than she cringed with terror at the enormity of the implication.

But Clare had fixed his heart upon a particular culmination of the evening. After three days of fasting, so powerful was the ache of hunger to catch her in his arms that, instead of uncorking vials of wrath, he laughed a big laugh.

"That was a nasty one, O fond dove! Now you 're going to say you 're sorry."

At his lifting himself out of his deep chair, she alertly got behind hers, where she stood watching him like a bird or a deer.

"You 're going to say you 're sorry," he repeated, and advanced with deliberation. She bent out of reach with a half-suppressed scream of nervous laughter, such as the game of fox-and-geese invariably elicits from young girls. After whirling successfully around the chair, she made for the door, Clare after her.

At the sound of their chase, all heads turned to watch this merry specimen of lovers' fooling.

"Go it, Grace!" shouted Alec from the pit. Junior shouted after him, "Go it, Grace!"

She had nearly the entire circle of the gallery to run before she could reach the hall door, the hallway, the staircase, and, if victorious, the safety of her

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room. Seeing the space before the dining-room narrowed by the loungers on the stairs, she got out through her panting laughter, in an acute cry: "Fair play!"

Rebecca, after a second wasted in lightning debate as to which of the two it would be sweeter to spite, Grace or her uncle, sprang to sweep the space clear. Grace flew by. But Clare, two yards behind, came to momentary grief over a silk cushion deftly pushed before his foot—just enough to give the race to the fleet-foot nymph.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THERESA came to Grace with an air of secrecy and chagrin:

"My dear child, Red has told me of your misfortune. I don't know what to say. I was never so mortified in my life. Such a sum, too. How did you come to have so much money on hand? You know it 's never wise. We have to be careful not to put temptation in the way of servants. Oh, yes; Red told me that nothing whatever was to be said about it, so that none of their feelings might be hurt, and I agreed. Only, you must n't think their feelings are quite as fine as yours, my child. However, I think it a good plan, in this case, to keep still, so as to put them off their guard, whoever is the thief. I will manage to have their rooms quietly searched. Do you remember the denomination of the bills? To-day is the cook's afternoon out, which will simplify the matter of hers. Sam has a room in the basement, and he 's at the stable a lot of the time, so that will be easy. Then Ellen will be taking the cook's place, and I 'll pin down Kate to some piece of work in the laundry. Then there 's Nora—"

"No, no, not Nora! I would n't for the whole

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world that Nora's room should be searched!" cried Grace, in pain.

"We may find the money before we get round to hers. But, of course, we may n't find it at all. They may have taken it outside the house; or it may be—it most likely is—someone from outside who stole it. It would n't be difficult; we 're all so careless about catching the glass doors. Grace, my dear, in view of this theft and the lesson it is, had n't you better let me have your pearl necklace to keep for you? I will put it in the safe. Not one of these old bureaus has a key that locks. Have n't you any other jewelry you 'd like me to take care of for you?"

"I have nothing of any value. My mother's things Lydia took with her—all but her wedding ring."

"That 's all right, then. Red has commissioned me to be your banker up to any figure you choose to mention. But my suggestion is that you keep very little money on hand, and ask me as often as you need more. Wait a minute: here are two twos for you, and a one."

When Grace passed Nora with her tray that day, she slipped by without a word. She could not bear to meet the small pretty eyes of Irish blue with black lashes. They were acquainted now, she and Nora, because she often spent an hour at Aunt Marinda's, and Nora would be in and out, waiting on the old lady.

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When Grace read aloud from the Book of Psalms, Nora would stay and listen with a grave and recollected air. Grace preferred to think Theresa moved by prejudice when she disqualified Nora for an unmingled respect and trust by relating that she brought home from her far-spaced "afternoons out" an unnatural cheerfulness along with a breath that roused misgivings. The honest, motherly, so human Nora! And now her room was to be searched. But how could this be done without her knowing it, when her room was right next to Miss Marinda's? She would discover; she would ask what the impertinent rummaging meant; she would be told that Miss Ingalis had missed money, and would believe that Miss Ingalis had suspected her of having stolen it.

Grace could not breathe, for the misery of the imagined scene. She wrung her impotent hands, and was yielding to the need to cry, when—what did it? —a thread seemed to snap that had held a blind in place: whereupon—illumination!

She need not suffer this torture of shame. Nora's room would not be searched. Nobody's room would be searched, in reality. Nobody had stolen the money. Theresa knew all the while where the money was, having subtracted it herself, or had it subtracted. And why? Because Red had told her to. And again why? Because he wished to make sure that Grace could not go away.

A degree of excitement pertained to this conviction

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that robbed it of pain and fear. The instinctive reply was defiance. Grace rejoiced that she had already, early that morning, as a result of the night's counseling, taken the next step on her side of this incredible game. She could wait with confidence, and be amused with watching machinations doomed to failure.

Grace had no name—she did not practise at twenty-two the self-analysis rendering a name necessary—for the quality that would have made death rashly preferable to having her will bent by that of Clarence Overcome, or any other belonging to the sex boastfully called the stronger—her dear father always excepted. In the person of Clarence Overcome, above all, the arrogance of man must not conquer.

With her battle mood cooling, she began not to feel so sure of a thing for believing which she had no ground but a flash of intuition. She brought reason to bear upon that strong, ungrounded opinion. It must have been Red's glibness in explaining the Quixy episode which had created the detestable suspicion that he lied. Theresa, in talking of the lost money, had shown the same glibness: she had reminded Grace ever so much of Red. Paradoxically, the two of them overdid naturalness.

When she was entirely calm, Grace refused to harbor such dishonoring and unjustifiable thoughts.

The difficulty was that, having once seen the thing in that way, she could see it in no other.

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An hour or two later, Sita surprised her by revealing a disposition to make up. The act of apology being at best full of awkwardness, Grace was eager to ease it—but found this solicitude of hers uncalled for. Sita's embarrassment took the mask of an extreme *disinvoltura*. Between that and Grace's ideal of charity, in a few minutes the faults of the past were wiped out and all was restored to the happy point of friendship preceding the break. There was laughing, there were caresses.

Glad as if of an odor of flowers after vulgar and defiling fumes, Grace yet longed after a good bit of it to be free from Sita's society. To manage an escape tactfully, she put on her things to go out for a walk.

"May I come too?" asked Sita, with the thoughtless precipitancy of girlhood.

A marked pause followed.

"I am afraid"—Grace hesitated—"it won't be much fun for you. I shall not want to talk. I want to think."

"I shall like it all the better!" Sita gushed fervently. "Because it will be treating me like a *real friend*. You 'll see how still I can keep. All I care about is *just to be with you.*"

None of the family made any remark to Grace concerning a situation that could not pass unnoticed. The lovers' quarrel was not counted as making any

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essential or final difference, it seemed; preparations for the marriage were sturdily pushed on. Grace found it easiest to play the same comedy as the rest: passivity on her part amounting to that. It was not in the nature of things that she should expose herself to the dreadfulness of telling these people the truth about the quarrel. If she had refused Theresa's invitation to come and help in choosing the silver that was to be the wedding present of the united Vawters, it would all have had to come out: what she thought of Red, what she thought of the rest. Better—oh, infinitely better for everybody—that the silver be bought, and even marked. In permitting this to be done, Grace was not saying to herself that the great shining store would never be hers. She had not said to herself that she should never marry Clarence Overcome. Among uncertain and battling thoughts, one of the steadiest still was a faith that sometime, somehow, after bog-holes waded and tangles of forest passed, after repentance and regeneration, a way would lead back to the light, and all be according to heart's desire.

But first she must go from that house. One thing at a time. Her immediate and absolute demand was for release from that smothering house.

So she bestowed a languid attention upon the question of the silver. That so much—so much silver could be meant for a single wedding gift, a single

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happy couple, taxed belief. Theresa went on and on buying; went on—perhaps a little ostentatiously—buying.

Had Theresa any idea, at the back of those handsome black eyes, that she was buying her—Grace? This thought sprang into the girl's mind at a gesture of Theresa's as she held up a filigree basket of rarely exquisite workmanship to make its frosty silveriness sparkle in the light.

That Theresa was doing what she could to win her, if not to buy her, was manifest in the reinforcement of her jolly friendliness. Verily a precious sister-in-law, second to none in power among a family which it were good and profitable to join. The attractive results of doing well for herself in marriage, Theresa enlarged upon to Grace with not very delicate art, when the two had gone to the new house to see whether a rug sent on approval toned in with the wall-paper. Her crude handling of the subject gave, indeed, one example more of that carelessness through which older people sometimes underestimate the brains of younger.

The matter of the rug having been discussed, she drew Grace down to the sofa where Clare had once sat with her—when the room was blue instead of yellow, as now. Though Theresa's movement appeared casual, Grace, because her spirit was on the alert, felt it to be calculated.

"It 's a beautiful room," Theresa said, after going

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over it with her eyes—the many mirrors, the rose garlands, the crystal sconces. Grace thought so, too. As she now looked at it, with knowledge of the fantastic sums it represented, she remembered her old original feeling about the house—that it was folly to suppose it would ever really be hers.

"A beautiful room," Theresa repeated. "Red tells me he is going to have a baby grand piano for this room, built on purpose for you. Dear me! perhaps it was meant for a surprise! Well, if so, I 've done it, and may as well go on. A gold piano,—gilt, that is to say,—with hand paintings of loves and flowers. Have you ever seen the kind I mean? It 's a French idea, I guess. This is to be your own especial parlor, so it will be nice to have a piano in it for your very own, besides the big rosewood one downstairs. If you want any books in this room,—as you are sure to, you studious little thing,—you must have them specially bound; a promiscuous lot of books would n't do. Pale brown leather with gold trimmings would be the right thing, I should say. You know, Red will let you have just what you want. He 'll spoil you to heart's content. You are one person who can get anything she pleases out of Red, or make Red do anything. It comes near being pathetic, the way that boy worships you. A lucky girl, I call you.

"This is a beautiful house, Grace. I don't see why you should n't be as happy in it as the day is long. It 's rather different from the way I began my mar-

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ried life, let me tell you. I fancy it 's rather different, too, from the way you 've been accustomed. But, of course, a house is only a house, a background. The life in it is more important than the house. And I don't see why you can't make your life as brilliant as you choose. Red is a genius at business. The firm is making money, of course, but Red, with his instinct for investments, is coining it on his own hook. He will be richer and richer. You will be able to do what you please. You can entertain—on such a scale! You can gather around you exactly the set you want. I dare say you would like brainier people than our set —let me say, rather, people brainy in a different way. It takes brains, you know, to do business successfully. You can have your fill of artists and poets and pianists. Don't tell me that they don't care about good dinners; I 've seen them at it—once or twice. Red can adapt himself to any crowd, can hold his own anywhere.

"There is n't anyone—mark and remember this, Grace—there is n't anyone has got a better brain than Red. See him among your artists and musicians, or scientists, or politicians, see him anywhere you could put him, Red would stand out, Red would be found to have as good a head as anybody present—the best head in sight, most likely. And that fact would tell. You 'd always have reason to be proud of Red.

"It 's the wife settles the matter of the society she gathers in her home. It rests with you to be the greatest swell in town, of a high-up, refined sort. All

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the money you want, the best of everything, a beautiful house, beautiful dresses. For Red not only is willing to give you beautiful dresses—he is keen to. You could n't be extravagant, as he would see it, in the matter of dressing. He loves a pretty woman, and it takes clothes to make a pretty woman; you know it as well as I do. You can bank on getting whatever you want in the matter of clothes and jewels. With all these things, as I was saying, I don't see what there is a girl can want more than you 've got to make her perfectly happy."

Grace intrusted to her silence the mission of passing for contented acquiescence, so that she need say nothing in reply. She was looking down with a pensive air that could have been mistaken for that of a bride impressed by the good fortune falling to her share, while she was in fact asking herself whether Theresa might not get some whiff of the thought in her mind, and see a likeness between herself and the probably quite eloquent personage who had before this shown to more than one soul, no doubt, all the kingdoms of the earth in one vision, with their glories.

Resentment so fired her that she could not refrain from looking up and squarely at Theresa, to let her judge how easy it would be to buy her with a house and clothes, or any of the things she had mentioned. . . .

If Theresa's fine eyes—which permitted so little to escape them, of a kind—saw nothing in Grace's but

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their charming clearness and pretty color, it was because she was really stupid, so far as Grace was concerned; or else because in the very next instant Grace, afraid of what might follow upon an unguarded utterance, had forbidden her eyes to tell Theresa anything.

In the night Clare, the old Clare, came sighing to the door of her heart: the fairy prince, the deliverer, Clare the wonderful, the tender, who had filled her days with beauty, to whom she had vowed the love and loyalty of a life!

He was there unchanged; her heart could not keep him out, or wish to. She complained to him with the certainty of sympathy about this stranger, this Red Overcome, who usurped his features: one who showed no honor or compassion toward orphans; one guilty of brazen untruthfulness; one capable of conducting himself toward a woman in sore distress of mind and body as a chivalrous gentleman would not conduct himself toward an afflicted monkey; among the pages of whose past, moreover, were passages kept hidden from her. What was it that everyone in the house knew, herself excepted?

She wished, in the sad blackness of a clouded, thunderous night, that she might have laid down her life for Clare; and wished with the same passion that she could die to be rid of the horror of Red.

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CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Theresa set her daughter Pinky to the task of hemming the marriage table-linen, Grace's amiability was put to the test, with the result that could be foreseen; for the unfortunate child's amiability was a thing to be played upon like a piano. With what countenance let Pinky sew for her and not sew with her, or read to her while she sewed, at the very least remain in the room for company?

When she had read aloud from the book of Pinky's predilection till her voice was tired and she was nauseated, Grace considered her choice of occupations: to remain with Pinky and take a hand at hemming napkins, or to go out—with Sita tagging on. She looked for a thimble and needle.

Clarence, in search of his fiancée, found her in the sewing-room. It was an unusual time of day for him to be in the house; at the sound of his approach her heart beat thickly; a wave of color creeping over her face nullified the effect of her cool and collected air. She went on placing her careful, unpractised stitches.

He drew a chair near to hers in the bay-window overlooking the yard with its one great elm. Pinky did not get up to go; Red seated himself with his back

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toward her, and for a few minutes talked of ordinary things.

After watching for a moment in silence Grace's head bent over her work—

"I 've come to say good-by," he said. "I 'm going to Jaffa Road for over Sunday. I 'm taking a couple of fellows for a short cruise on the *Inez Second*. I shall get back on Monday, but have to go straight to the office; so you won't see me till the usual time. Three days without the big brute, Grace. I shall be gone three whole days."

He dropped his voice and spoke in a breath through closed teeth, with the object of making it difficult for his niece to overhear:

"I can't stand any more of this. I 'm going off for a respite. Wind and water are good nerve specialists. So as not to have too damned a time, I 'm making believe that when I get back I shall find you turned again into the only girl I care to think about. Look up, little one!"

Partly to prove that there was nothing in her eyes to give him cheer, she obeyed. She kept her eyes steady while he sounded them. But his wide black pupils gave her more and more, the longer she gazed into them, the impression of a chasm into which one might fall. Her eyelids dropped abruptly. Cheered, after all, his voice took a livelier note:

"Miss me a little, sweetheart! And have a little gladness ready when I come back on Monday!"

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He caught both her hands, kissed them quickly, and was off.

"I was n't going to leave the room just because Uncle Red came into it!" Pinky sniffed, with a self-justified air. "It 's my room more than his!"

Grace breathed in relief to think that for three days her heart would not hold its breath because of his footstep.

"How one does miss Red!" sighed Theresa at dinner-time, looking affectionately toward the place at the table which her brother was wont to occupy. "Children,"—this included the whole family,—"I want each one of you to report when he comes in the last thing at night, because I am going to have Sam shut the gate. There have been burglaries lately in this neighborhood,"—her eye turned to Grace as to one in the secret of her meaning,—"and, without Red like a watch-dog at the front door, I shall feel easier to know the gate is shut. So be careful, you boys, if you don't want to climb over the railing, with the danger of getting spiked on it, or having the policeman come and investigate you."

One watching closely might have seen a faint, enigmatical smile break across Grace's delicate lip. It was scorn for Theresa—with her tale of burglars!—derision of Theresa, who thought it worth while to play this elaborate comedy for the sake of deceiving her who was so little deceived. There were people

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in this house who would be surprised by and by to find out who had been stupid.

Suppose—suppose, however, that all should fail: that she should finally, in spite of everything, fall into the chasm of which Clare's eyes had given her the realization? His remembered look clung to her, haunted her, frightened—yet, in a way that made her hate herself, allured her. Suppose that all the forces combined against her should prove too much—that all those wills bent upon her should hypnotize her, and that in September she should be married to Red? That would be falling into a chasm—where all would be dark roses under sultry golden skies, and the fruits of the tree of life—all but one!—low-hung and easy to gather.

A hunger existed in her, of mysterious origin and dangerous strength, which could be satisfied only by mingling her life with that of this man—Red or Clare—as close as the waters of two streams. She had a foreshadowing of the reckless joy she might feel in the frustration of all the fixed and high determinations that stood in the way; but knew in the same breath, from the whisper of her conscience, that such frustration would not happen unless her will first were corrupted.

And if, with open eyes and the consent of her will, she went to live inside the hollow hill where the old unmoral gods still make it Elysium, what should she

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do if sounds of Christian church-bells came to trouble her in her sleep? What would there be to do? With what grace, in the name of self-respect, could she repent to the end of the world?

She hoped feverishly from that onward that she should not see Red again—that before his return she might be gone. She counted the hours till the letter which she was painfully awaiting could reach her. It did not seem to her that letters were interfered with in that house where she now suspected everybody and everything: they were received at the door too openly.

Theresa herself, in fact, handed her the letter on Saturday afternoon, after saying carelessly: "It 's your sister's writing, is n't it?"

With well acted calm, Grace took it with her out of sight, thinking as she climbed the stairs that she should hide her money, not in any bureau this time, but between the pages of her most uninteresting-looking book, Latin preferably.

She had a small laugh of glee at the success of the trap she had set for Lydia, writing her a breathless line of request for an immediate fifty dollars, from which Lydia was to infer that her sister's credit in the eyes of the rich folk not yet securely her own was involved, and not to suspect that she would be feathering the arrow that should stick in her own breast: an empty-handed little sister standing in her Welaka door.

Good enough for Lydia, this punishment; no more out of proportion than the demand for fifty dollars

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from the person who had taken one's four thousand. Grace had no fear of Lydia, at the very bottom of her heart, or doubt of being able to make her understand, when she could tell her the whole story. They were of one blood. When the real Lydia, so much of the time buried under grudges and vexations, came to the surface, as once in a while she did, she was tender for brief spells toward the subject of her perpetual impatience, the sister whom her scoldings had never been able to reform.

The girl paused to brace herself for the possible shock of disappointment; but she did it with a sense of luxury, for she could feel the money of deliverance —the letter was thick because of it. She tore it open.

The letter was thick, alas, because of inclosing a smaller letter, inscribed to herself at her old address and readdressed by a post-office official to the care of Mrs. Batey Poor at Welaka. After a wave of sickness that spread from her heart to the end of every nerve and took the strength out of her knees, she recognized sadly that she had been over-sanguine in thinking that, even if Lydia had made all haste, every postal wheel would move so accurately as to bring her letter at the earliest minute possible.

She studied the envelope, but got no idea from it. Tearing that open too, she looked for the signature:

"Andreas Dane."

With eyes of wonder, she turned back to the beginning.

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"My dear Miss Ingalis:

"I am writing to ask your pardon for an offense of which I cannot repent, but for which I yet desire most sincerely to be pardoned. If you have lately visited the exhibition room of Max and Bender, you may understand what I mean. You have not forgotten our old contests of the composition class at Fowler's—you remember the screen on the morning when our subject was 'Poverty.' But you cannot know how a ray from the halo you placed around your Bride penetrated the armor in which I was prepared to fight the world. I have seen so much of poverty, and hated it so deeply, I could not be sufficiently revenged on it, however monstrous and loathsome I painted it. Yet, when I saw your picture, I knew that the one who had made it was somehow in the right. My intelligence revolted, and I said to myself all the practical modern things, in which there is a great deal of sense, in which there is all good sense. But when you had been pointed out to me, I knew that you were angelically right.

"I have thought about it a great deal since that time, to discover why you were right. It is clear that the things accompanying poverty are not good. We are not barefoot mendicant friars; want, sickness without alleviations, ignorance, narrowness of circumstance, are evils that the lovers of their kind try to end and not to encourage.

"But I find that there can be a frame of mind for the

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modern man also which your white bride of Saint Francis symbolizes. When I examine the world, I see that the love of riches is at the bottom of an enormous share of the baseness and wrong in it. A contrary, a counteracting love, if one might attain to it, would bring the balance straight: love of the tasks that have so largely been assigned to the poor—labor, service, every kind of service. Love of that frugality which makes men more equal, as well as prevents the pampered body from smothering the spirit. And then, simply, that love of man which would forbid wanting more for oneself than others have, or wishing to keep things from others, and would result in a noble poverty—the poverty that comes from sharing, and again sharing. Saint Francis was hardly poorer actually than Fénelon in his episcopal palace, giving away his revenue day by day.

"Some testimony of all this I wished to bear, and stole your thought; counting upon your generosity to forgive me for declaring according to my ability a gospel forgotten by everybody I have ever known—except you. That I made the vision in your likeness you will forgive also, I hope. It was not only because the idea that it embodies has become inseparable from you, but because I fear the treacheries of life, and that the image of the far-away princess might fade a little from my visual memory with a long time passing.

"If you have not been to Max and Bender's, I hope you will go, after which you will understand better

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what I have written. Will you send me a line to tell me you are not annoyed?

"When I was placing all my strength in the ambition to conquer fame and fortune with art for my tool, you reminded me that there is something more beautiful—which is beauty. For which I thank you.

"In profound sincerity,

"Yours to command,

"ANDREAS DANE."

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CHAPTER XX

GRACE'S rendering of the theme given out at Fowler's art school had not involved, on the day referred to by Andreas Dane, any great profundity of thought and feeling, and she knew it. Yet because of his letter there took place in her a yearning reaching back toward a time when it seemed to her she had come nearer to being fine and good. It was owing to her effort to revive the ideals of her old self—who, so unhappy as she was, fostered beautiful thoughts for consolation—that, coming half awake in the night, she found herself murmuring over and over, like a child in fear of forgetting its lesson: "My father's daughter makes no compromise with evil!"

Sunday stretched before her, waste and long. Nobody in the house except Aunt Dolores and the servants went to church. She did not often go herself: it had not been her father's custom. But what an excellent way to get rid of a few of the interminable hours before Monday and the nearest mail-time! Incidentally, the venerable ceremonies, the organ music, the soft light strained through holy symbols and presences, might engender in her breast a little quiet.

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But the motive above others for going to church was to get away for a breathing-space from the house and all its inmates. Sita, who followed her around like a dog, would not offer to accompany her to church—of that she could feel reasonably sure.

But Sita did. It was when Grace, in consternation, looked her in the face that she saw what she might have seen earlier, had she looked as searchingly: that Sita was playing a part.

Grace's thought traveled back, as nimble as lightning, over their late intercourse, and the situation became so clear that she was ashamed of having been deceived by such an inferior actress.

So as not to appear to have noticed anything, which she took to be the game, she went to church in spite of Sita, and with her. She marveled that such perfidy could yet seem almost innocent, because the perpetrator was devoid of moral shame. Sita wore the pleased air of a young one intrusted with a grown-up task, and proud of acquitting herself so well. It was a pleasure, though, to see her yawn during the sermon.

However much one's heart felt as if a wreath of thorns pressed down upon it, there was nothing to do, when on Monday the early mail brought nothing, but readjust one's hopes and fix them on the afternoon. To remain still while waiting taxed the nerves so beyond their capacity that Grace, in search of

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some way to allay her restlessness, chose the rotunda gallery for the exercise of walking—a pastime which she could hope to enjoy there without company.

The domed room was in delicate half-light, even though summer sunshine entered through the doors open on the yard, whence came Indian yells and sounds of romping, happily deadened by distance: Bobby was home for the holidays. Round and round Grace went, with hands clasped before her and eyes bent on the floor. When, suffering from a beginning of dizziness, she stood still to let her head unwind, something clinging to those old walls found it possible for the first time to communicate with her. She got a sense for the first time of the poor things inhabiting that house when it was a private hospital: the nervous patients—politely so called, most likely a little mad; prisoners there, pacing the floor perhaps like caged animals, while they dreamed and plotted their escape. The iron gates and railings had been set up to baffle them. A thought sprang, in that connection, which suspended Grace's heart-beats: was it conceivable that she no more than those others would find it possible to get away from this sinister abode? No, no; these were not mediæval times; this was the end of the nineteenth century, in a free country.

She started walking again, and made a sharp effort to think collectedly, sanely. With the best intentions, Lydia might not have been able to find the money out

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of hand; it was unfair to think she would fail altogether to send it. But—the wisest course in an unintelligible world being to prepare for the worst—suppose Lydia did fail? What was there to do?

After two months in their midst, she knew a good deal about her companions in the house. She had eyes and ears; Pinky, besides, let herself go in a good gossip now and then. Was there anything to hope from any one of them?

To begin with those to whom her heart was most inclined—the best, who ought rightly to be the most promising: Uncle Sylvanus, the kind old man, had, alas, nor resolution nor resource: he was what Dolores must have meant by a hen. And Dolores herself, the dignified, the pious—would she not, but for being a hen, have fled long ago from this house of her humiliation? Yes, though it had been to become a scrubber of floors. Set aside the thought of help from the good ones.

Pinky, who came next in the order of innocuousness, might not belong in the same broad division of humankind, but how expect from one so narrow and dry a befriending for which a little impetus of generosity was indispensable? Sim Vawter was, in the same way, out of the question: a girl could not be imagined taking her troubles to him. Nor to those young hawks, Alec and Junior, violent, indiscreet, alert for the price. Black Overcome she had come to fear and hate, to regard as having blood on

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his hands almost, for he had been cruel to his wife—a poor enough hen, from all accounts: he had broken her heart. Dolores, who loved the meek departed lady, had talked about it; so had Pinky; Theresa herself had inadvertently let a reference to it fall. Black Overcome's corner of the room, his end of the table, were to Grace as if filled with a cold gray fog, enveloping something evil and not understood.

The one upon whom the mind dwelt most wistfully, after all, was Rebecca, her cruel mouth and inimical eyes notwithstanding. It had been strange to learn that Rebecca had had brain fever as a result of grief over her mother's death: the short hair was a reminder of it. And yet during her mother's lifetime she had not been a good or dutiful daughter—quite the reverse. Singular, passionate, discomforting girl! If she had been well disposed toward one, hers were the force and daring to have made her an effectual aid; but since she was not, and never missed a chance to show it, how trust her not to betray one with the same vicious zest she had been seen to exhibit in stamping out a spider?

Grace flamed with sudden rage and horror at them all, nightmare people of this nightmare house. She clenched her fists with the yearning to annihilate it and them together, and wake in a world where they had no more reality than any other bad dream, and she could take up again, as if it had not been interrupted, the life with Lydia and Batey. Yes, it shone

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in the past with a thin glaze of gold, for those days had been happy at least in being innocent; they had been peaceful at least in that she had not been at war with herself. Though Lydia returned to would not be suave, or the bloodless Batey sympathetic, yet the power to rejoin them represented at this pass the sum of earthly desire.

Her heart in its desolate search turned, not for the first time, to Ida Lamont, and she wept tears of aching affection. There was one who would respond to an appeal, no matter how demanding. Why not secretly write to her, without waiting longer for Lydia? Why not?

That which gave Grace pause was the reflection that Ida—lavish, laughing, warm-hearted Ida—had known Clarence Overcome for years. Her joy in discovering him on board the *Pretoria*, their long talks from steamer-chairs brought close together, while the old major and she, Grace, paced the deck arm in arm—all had proclaimed his footing of an old, intimate friend. And knowing Clarence so well, Ida had done what she could—delicately, but sometimes not so delicately—to bring about the match between them. She had taken frank credit for fitting her little friend with a rich husband, the grand prize in life, avowedly.

Grace held to the belief that Ida would be true to her—but yet, how forecast the actions of a person who in fundamental ways has been proved different

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from oneself? Might not Ida fear the appearance of working against Red? and have reason to fear it? And then, to place oneself under an obligation for money after taking a high moral attitude toward the manner of acquiring that money—was it decent? could it come to good? Were it not better to pray God and rely on Lydia?

And so, caught in a coil of youth and timorousness and scrupulosity; groping with troubled hands of thought, and vainly, around the walls that closed her in, Grace trod the rotunda gallery.

Becoming aware of Theresa in the dining-room doorway watching her, she stopped short. Theresa was the arch-enemy; yet every time Theresa spoke to her in that hearty voice, the fear would come that she might be guilty of a ridiculous injustice.

When Theresa asked, "What are you doing, my dear?" Grace answered amiably, with a drawn smile: "I was feeling nervous,—the weather perhaps is to blame,—and I thought this a good way to work it off."

Red Overcome took for granted that his three days of absence were the cause of his sweetheart's paler, sadder looks. He was startled by the change in her, and only after scrutiny realized that it was due in part to her having returned to wearing her hair as she had worn it at the time of their first acquaintance, when on the *Pretoria* the sea-wind used to

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ruffle the adorably demure little unfashionable head. That she was deeply enough in love with him to have dark rings around her sweet eyes for his sake gave him, after the first whip-cut of glee, a melting sensation within. He wanted to gather her in his arms on the spot, and carry her away, away, out of memory of the mysterious bothers playing the devil between them. With a face like that after three days' separation, not to know, the darling dunce, that what she wanted was hardly to go away from him!

He had high hopes of a better understanding between them before parting for the night, and, elated, showed a cheerful animation all through dinner, hoping to raise her spirits by it. He thought he had succeeded; but when they got up from the table, she surprised him by slipping away before he could stop her, and, with the excuse of a headache, retreating to her room.

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CHAPTER XXI

LATE that night, after all sounds in the house of feet withdrawing to sleeping quarters had died away, the door of Grace's bedroom opened without a premonitory knock. Rebecca stood on the threshold.

She was in the summer silk of the evening, and had not taken the cherry ribbon out of her hair. Her coming was so unusual that Grace, half undressed, and Sita, already in bed, looked at her with a certain tension, waiting to hear what she wanted. Her eyes were gloomily lustrous beneath the habitual frown; the pout of her lips was disdainful, as usual; but expanded nostrils gave a hint of some emotion at work, the character of which was not revealed.

"Come into my room, Grace, will you?" she said, more like one demanding than one making a request. "I want to show you something."

"Can I come too? Can I come too?" cried Sita, and in a fever of curiosity jumped half out of bed.

"No!" snapped her cousin, turning to leave.

Grace pulled on a wrapper. A stir of hope was in her heart because of this simple-seeming event, which wore the face, to her, of something good happening at last. Rebecca was going to show her some

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ordinary girl-thing, probably—a hat or dress she had just bought: the lateness of the hour has never formed an obstacle to young women who wish to show one another a hat, or dress, or his photograph. The important point was that Rebecca must have felt an impulse to express friendliness, and was taking this naïve way of making a beginning. Her brusqueness covered a pardonable embarrassment.

The smothered, trembling regard that Grace harbored for Rebecca was reinforced, on the way to her room, by a kind of confidence inspired by the straight young back and proudly set head going before her.

After she had closed the door, Rebecca said, pointing to a chair near the window, "Sit down." As she turned off the only gas-jet till it was the size of a sapphire in a ring, and then pulled another chair to the same window, Grace understood that the promise to show her something had been a pretext to bring her where they could talk. She was waiting with too great interest to see what would be the subject of their conversation to try to forecast it.

Rebecca leaned on the window-sill, with her head projecting into the soft June night. At the darkening of the room, the nocturnal out-of-doors had become relatively light; street-lamps reddened the house-fronts and made the stars of the far-away sky look blue and tiny, almost invisible. Grace examined the outlook with greater care, to see whether it had any-

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thing unusual to account for Rebecca's absorption. No: the front stoop; the iron gate, wide open to-night; the sidewalk with its lamp-post; the deserted street; the houses across the street. . . .

As Rebecca had brought her there for a purpose, she had only to wait, Grace reflected, for this to unfold. Meanwhile, it did not seem to her the occasion for tentative small talk on her part. Her wonder at the prolonged silence was taking the quality of mystification, when her companion spoke:

"I want you to see who goes out of this house. I don't know how long we may have to wait."

The silence that again came to be was indefinably different from the silence before. After the length of time it would take to revolve with care the words last heard, a voice issued from the slimmer of the two shapes in the window-frame, which had a proper sound of character and control, even a commendable coolness:

"Will it interest me?"

"I don't know!" came from the bulkier shape, in a small burst of impatience at being required to bother with fine discriminations; the voice added, after a moment: "But it will open your eyes."

After another interval Grace said, quietly enough: "Tell me whom I shall see coming out of the house."

"Can't you wait?" asked Rebecca, in a tone of reprehension for the evil vice of curiosity.

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"You said there might be a long time to wait."

"All right—I 'll tell you; and then you 'll get proof with your own eyes that what I tell you is true. You 'll see a person that I let in the house myself half an hour ago. Why did I let her in? Because the servants have orders not to. She 's my best friend, and called it a matter of life and death to have a talk with Uncle Red; so I smuggled her into his room, where he could n't help coming in the course of the night, and where she 's now having her scene with him."

The words came forth with an effect of ferocity, poor substitutes for knives, aimed by a desire to stab. There was dead stillness after them, as if the victim had been adequately struck. But presently it was as if the victim rallied and spoke, after all, without sign of discomposure from the blow.

"You mean Mrs. Fenn, don't you?" Grace asked.

"Yes. Has he told you about her himself?"

"No." After another pause for reflection: "Why are you telling me about her?"

"Because she 's my best friend; and as I feel in my bones what he 's putting her through downstairs, it struck me I might be getting in a little fine work up here. He 's in love with you, fast enough—oh, he 's in love with you *now*. But I can do *some* good. You won't be ideally happy when you know he was just as much in love with her, and more, less than

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six months ago. Dotty about her! And he 's treated her like dirt."

Rebecca's voice had the defensively aggressive ring of a child's bragging of doing wrong. The news with which she thought, presumably, to startle Grace fell on no unprepared ground. It seemed to Grace that she had known this already. She felt it vital to get a just comprehension of the situation, and asked:

"How had she treated him?"

"Oh, Grace Fenn is a beautiful woman, and she 's spoiled—they always are!" Rebecca's voice changed to defiantly exculpating. "She was n't careful of his feelings, as far as making him jealous goes; but, after all he 'd sworn about devotion, she never supposed but she could bank on *something*. He went off to the West Indies in a fury with her; and when she was looking for him to come back in a better temper, and was prepared to forgive him, he turned up whistling and engaged to you. We all supposed it was a way of getting square with her, till we saw you together. Then we gave it up—it was too mysterious."

"Was he engaged to Mrs. Fenn?"

"He wanted to be—he pleaded to be. It amounted to his being engaged to her, don't you know, without her being exactly engaged to him. She 's always been a beauty, I told you, and used to having her own way. She went so far, anyhow, as letting him go ahead and buy a house and fit it up for her—the house that 's going to be yours; but she did n't consider he had

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any right to make a fuss if she went to dine and to the theater with another man. She 's a spoiled beauty, I 've told you already! But she could n't have believed—could anybody?—that he would come back in six weeks hating her just as much as he loved her before! And no pretense about it—can't tolerate the sight of her. It 's genuine; I see it, and tell her so. But she can't believe it. Now he spits on her, she thinks he 's the only man she ever loved or meant to marry. She thinks he 's only pretending about you to hurt her, because his hate is only a different kind of love.

"And when he paraded you at the party with the pearls on you that she 'd thrown back at him in their last quarrel, it did look like it, I own. But I knew better: I knew it was only Uncle Red's nature not to miss a chance to get a knife in; it was n't love in disguise. But she 's been possessed with the idea that if she could only get at him by themselves for a minute, and explain, plead, everything would come right again. He 's been sending back her letters unopened; he won't let her come near him.

"So I finally agreed to help her, because she 's fretting herself into a sickness. When she 's seen for herself that it 's no use, she 'll start in to get over it. She promised to make a sign when she came out—a sign of joy if she 's won him back. But if I had n't been dead sure of the outcome I don't know that I 'd have helped her. I don't want her to marry

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Uncle Red—know him too well. You can have him!"

"You hate him very bitterly. That is not as likely to make us clear-sighted for the good in a person as for the bad, is it?"

"I 've known him all my life. How long have you known him?"

To this simple question, put mockingly, the change that followed appeared due. Grace dropped the sword with which she had been fencing, and threw herself on the generosity of her adversary. Rebecca, in this night's revelation of herself, had not been judged fit for hatred. Grace believed her honest and, if very unkind to her, still, unkind to her in the way of being true to the other Grace. Ignorance—dire, abysmal; ignorance in the things of the spirit like that which would ensue in the world of sense from the lack of two out of the five senses—ignorance in some measure excused her wickedness. Instead of drawing back and replying haughtily to Rebecca's ironical question, Grace bent forward to come nearer to the enemy, and, making her voice softer, spoke humbly, propitiatingly:

"I will tell you the truth, Rebecca. I have not known him long enough to wish to marry him so soon as the wedding day is set for. You have perhaps noticed that lately there has been a little trouble between us."

"We 've all noticed it. But we 've only got to

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see your faces, both of you, to know it won't amount to anything. What 's it all about, anyhow?"

"I had rather not tell the reason of our difference, but I will tell you that I have been wanting very much to have the marriage put off and to go away for a time. But I can't seem to accomplish it. The things you have just told me make me wish, naturally, more than ever that I could go away. But they don't want me to. Clare and Theresa don't want me to, and they won't let me. And it happens that at the moment I am without money, or I should not have to wait for their consent. If I had my fare to Welaka, in Florida, where my sister lives, not for twenty-four hours longer would I remain here. Nothing could keep me. If you would let me have the money to go, Rebecca,—lend it me, I mean,—if you would show me this friendliness, I should cease at once to be a source of anguish to your beautiful friend Mrs. Fenn. She would have a free field."

"You 're bursting with jealousy, are you? Good work!" cried Rebecca, harsh as a cock-crow coming to disturb some flattering morning dream. "But you 're mistaken. I don't want you out of the way. I told you, I don't want Grace Fenn to marry Uncle Red. No, I thank you! To get him twice in my family, when once is too many. Then, I care too much about Grace. Uncle Red 's got a mean, cruel streak in him, you 'll find out. No; everything 's for

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the best. Marry him and take him out of the house. All I wanted was to drop a spider in his cup of happiness for future use. This quarrel of yours will blow over, but you won't feel as contented and safe in your marriage as if you did n't know he 'd been dotty about another woman just before you came—and could be dotty over you one minute, and willing the next to see you chopped on a chopping-block and the pieces thrown to the dogs. You won't be so glad, when you know what you 're really getting."

"If I could believe"—Grace was heard breathing quickly, from no uncertain emotion—"if I could believe, Rebecca, that you are in earnest, and are not doing this because you are in torture over your friend downstairs and made reckless of what harm you do, I should think you were just as cruel, as malignantly cruel, as you call your Uncle Red. I should think it a family trait. What harm have I ever done to you?"

"Oh, you came and got yourself in the way, and you 've made me sick, with your airs and affectations."

"I have—I know. I 've been sorry. I have n't known how to help it. And for things that are not my fault you want, just as far as you have power, to make me wretched for my whole life. If that is not cruel—if that 's not mean—"

"I don't care what you call me! And I don't care what you do! Even if I wanted to lend you money for your fare to Florida, where 'd I get it? I have n't got an allowance. We have accounts at all the big

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stores, but pa doles out spending money to me; there 's rowing about it the whole time; I 'm always without a cent. Besides, they 'd find out."

"You 're not afraid of them."

"Not afraid of them? Not afraid to work against Uncle Red? Ain't I?! . . . You don't know Uncle Red, I 've told you already. And Aunt Theresa is right there, like another of him. All she knows in the world is brother Red. Let her see he wants a thing, she gets it for him. Let her see he wants you, and she 's ready to feed you to him like a little pink radish. She hated Grace Fenn because she kept him dancing; and she loved you because you were a sweet revenge. She pretended to think anyone in the world could see you were ten times superior. She made it out you were a feather in the family's cap, and a whole cap of feathers on Uncle Red's head in the eyes of the people that had seen Grace Fenn make him look small. Of course she was pleased with you! And of course he won't let you get away. I should n't like to be the one responsible for your escaping."

"What would he do to you, Rebecca?"

"I don't know. But if you think he 'd just let it go— He 'd do something devilish, never you fear, if it was only to scare me to death, like poor Uncle Miles. See here, don't you dare tell about to-night, or I 'll do something in that line myself."

"I won't tell, Rebecca—but not because you threaten me, not because I 'm afraid of you. For

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if you are afraid of them, don't you see, you 're no better than I for courage and strength. Rather worse—because suddenly, I swear to you, I could burst out laughing, I am so little afraid of you all. The thing is too funny, too fantastically vulgar and ugly; it does n't belong to real life. I laugh, you see. But that you 're anxious to do evil in safety surprises me, rather, in you; because I had imagined, before seeing you near to, that you were a different kind of girl—bold, you know, and generous. It was some notion of romantic fitness, I suppose, clinging to me from the story books I have read."

"I don't care what you say! I don't care what you think! I know what I 'm about. I know Uncle Red—you don't. Uncle Red does what he wants to; he gets what he wants. He *gets it*, that 's all. He 's always got it; Theresa brought him up like that. He did n't get it with Grace Fenn, and see how he 's catching up. If you think Uncle Red lets go or gives in, don't you be deceived. And if it looks as if he were giving in, look out! for he is n't,—then particularly he is n't. Hush! I heard the door click. She 's coming. Pull back out of sight."

Rebecca leaned eagerly forth, and Grace, her heart throbbing with the strength of her emotion, looked downward from the shadow of the curtain.

The street-lamp lighted a figure in black descending the steps. As if reminded, it stopped half way, and, twisting backward, raised a white face to the

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window where Rebecca was stationed. It was recognizably the beautiful Mrs. Fenn. After one small flap with it as a sign, she pressed her handkerchief to her lips, while a convulsion ran over all that remained visible of her face. With the other arm she made a desolate gesture, eloquent of failure. She hurried to the sidewalk, and, with the weighted, trembling feet of one struggling in a bad dream, ran down the street. They watched the knot of her luminous hair as it diminished and went out.

Rebecca, breathing through clenched teeth, turned from the window.

"Damn Uncle Red!" she came out burningly. "Oh, damn him! I wish something—the most awful that could—would happen to him. I hope he 'll have some disease. I hope he 'll have some accident. Wish his horse would bolt with him and break his neck. No—I wish it would drag him along the ground and spoil his face for him. Grace Fenn would get over her infatuation then, and so, I guess, would you, Grace Ingalis. You! You!—" her intensity increased, as her imagination entered fields even more rewarding, "I wish something hideous would happen to you! Wish I could stamp my foot and make the ground open to swallow you, while his heart is good and bound up in you. That would give him a wrench; that would get Grace Fenn even with him."

Her wrath fell suddenly; it was difficult, in the darkness, to tell why.

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"I don't mean I wish you any harm for your own sake this minute," she took up, as if weary from her own passions. "This minute, I don't. I 'd be willing to help you, if I could—this minute. But it 's true that I have n't got the money, and don't see any way of getting it without their finding out. And it 's not a time when I want to get into a family row. I 've lost my nerve, somehow, this last year." Her wrath flared again. "Why on earth should I get myself in hot water for you? What business of mine is it? Good night," she said dryly; "I want to go to bed."

She turned up the gas, and the illumination of the room formed as clear a sign of dismissal as turning it out would ordinarily do.

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CHAPTER XXII

IN the dead of night, Grace wept deeply, endlessly, as one weeps only in youth, and in youth a few times only, but as it were fitting to weep at any age if one could believe that the stars were blinded, the flowers withered, for good and all, love and happiness done with. So as not to waken Sita, she cried inaudibly, as far as possible inside of herself. It seemed to her at one moment that, notwithstanding her efforts, Sita had heard, and was lying awake in strained immobility to listen. The diversion of this perception quelled her grief for a few minutes: the thing seemed too monstrous. But, upon the reflection that it was not different in that from all the rest, she wept on with reckless abandonment of the spirit.

Her woe, translated into a wind-wail that swept through and whirled around her, would have carried to a distant ear able to interpret the wind one anguished, reiterated question: "What snare is this that youth had set for my life? What pitfall had life prepared for my youth?" Being alive, being young—nothing but that—had involved loving, and contained the great illusion that what one loves must by that same sign be worthy. And now, what to do forever

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with this burden weighing down the heart, indestructible, useless, and ashamed!

When the blackness of night was beginning to yield to the dawn, she placed her case on the knees of her father, that dear earthly father of whom she was surer that he would sympathize with her than she could be of the heavenly one. She asked him to ask the Other, more powerful over events, to remember the extraordinary difficulties of his servant's present pass; not to forget, either, her consistent if confused groping after beauty of life, her return in sackcloth and ashes from the paths of worldliness into which her feet for a time had strayed.

She wept till her head felt like sodden wood, and her eyes strange and drowned and diminished. Tears were wrung from her by the contemplation of her personal tragedy and the tragedy of life in general, till not one was left to shed, and she lay emptied of grief as well as of joy. Then she slept for a few hours, and awoke surprisingly calm.

Her breast was as quiet as a sacked city of which all the inhabitants have been killed or carried into captivity. Able, in this suspension of sensibility, to think with great singleness, she elected to think thoughts of purposeful strength and of hope. Her term in this house was near its end. The delayed letter would come to-day. She should start forth on a walk at the right hour in relation to her train. Sita would be with her, no doubt. Very well; Sita

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would behold her buying her ticket. What could she do about it, little spy, except run home and tell, too late to alter anything?

There were others in the house who had not had their normal good night. The delights of satisfied anger had retarded sleep for one of these, as a too full repast might have done. Red Overcome did not grudge the time taken from rest to indulge visions of the humiliation of one who had earned his hate. Sleep finally drowned out a bitingly zestful frame of mind, to keep him, however, in dreamless darkness for all too short a while. He emerged from it in the small first of the daybreak, to feel annoyed at waking in this unaccustomed fashion before time to get up; he accounted for his broken sleep by the fact that he was bothered about Grace.

He was worse than bothered—he was tormented. Her face of yesterday afternoon spurred him to find some remedy, and that quickly, to a misery that reacted on him in a searching pain through heart and vitals. The poor child was her own first victim; that obstinacy which made her stick to her point was like a weapon in her hands, with which she wounded herself while wounding him. She had her own kind of strength, the darling dunce, and his strength—since she balked so at domination!—must not be put forth, except so far as necessary to keep her from doing lasting mischief. Ingenuity was here in demand—or

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perhaps only eloquence. There were in the language the right words to force a yielding that would leave her pride unoffended. He did not regard himself as poor in verbal resource. Mere storms of words, aptly let loose, might do them both the service of giving her no chance to talk back. She thought he did not understand her. It was she who did not understand her complete good fortune in having a man as ready as he was to play any part she wished to see him in—just short of the lunatic who would let her go. As to that, he could n't: it was n't the way he was made. She had no comprehension, even now, of the strength of his love.

He thought of this a long time; he meditated upon the sweetness of finally holding her and having his clamorous need of her stilled by quiet possession. A little thing whose waist he could almost span with his hands, whose ankle he could encircle with thumb and finger—what was it made her the only girl in the world that counted? No inquiry into this question gave results satisfying to the intelligence. The expression of her upper lip had something to do with it, he thought.

He grew drowsy amid yearnings to give her presents, spoil her, make her his little queen, revive in her that admiration for him which she had not used to conceal so well. God almighty! how glad he was of the rupture with Grace Fenn—first a devil and now a dose—that had opened the way for Grace Ingalis.

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That last heavy sleep, from which he waked with a start and the feeling of having overslept, left him enervated, languid, with his good humor—that fine flower of a good appetite, good sleep, the habit of success—notably in eclipse. A cold shower-bath brought him more nearly up to pitch, but could not dispel a most unphilosophical impatience with the very nature of things, the slowness of time included. A most uncharacteristic fear, too, worried him, while in this condition, of things going wrong in spite of all the forethought and attention to detail that a man could bring to a good cause.

He was at the office, attending to work, when a ray illumined the part of his mind that was not concerning itself with profits or losses to Overcome Brothers, and warned him of one thing that might easily go wrong. At the picture of the increase of vexation to him following upon the venom-darting of a serpent hacked in two, he ground his teeth and, dropping work, turned his undivided mind upon the subject.

Not at once, but after perhaps half an hour of reflection, he had his breath-catching inspiration; he gave another half hour to examining it. Then he did an almost unexampled thing for an Overcome; in the middle of the forenoon he left the store and went home.

His search for Grace was short; Theresa could tell him where to find her.

She had seated herself, with her book, on the part

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of the bench under the elm that faced away from the house, and so could not see him approach. Sanguine as he felt, and sure of his big strength, the first glimpse of Grace's arm beyond the tree-trunk—so slender, too, and clothed in gentle white—deprived him of the absolute confidence he was wont to cherish in his power of putting his projects through. He reacted valiantly against this lover's nervousness, and, saying to himself that it was conquer or die this time, walked over the grass.

It was a sweet day, of that warmth which has not lost all freshness and sparkle; the green had summer's fullness already, but no dustiness as yet. Red could see, before she had seen him, that Grace was not reading; her book was on her lap, while her eyes were fixed on the ghostly head of a dandelion gone to seed.

She looked up quickly when his bulk cut off the green glare of the grass, and he saw her hand tighten on the edge of her book, as if seized with a cramp. It rather hurt him, and her face, which she had smuggled out into the open air, hoping that before lunch-time the breeze would have blown away the marks of the night, shocked him at the same time that it hurt. For the breeze had not done the work expected of it. He felt nothing so strongly at the moment as that this must be stopped. Grace crying herself blind—mysterious child!—when there was he, ready to unhitch the moon from the skies to please her!

"Is n't this rather unusual?" she asked, in a voice

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which, with the revelations of her face directly under his eyes, came as a surprise, so controlled it was, casual, in good form.

"You mean my coming home at this hour of day? Unusual? Yes. I don't know when I 've done it before. I don't remember, in fact, ever doing it. May I sit down? I notice you don't ask whether I 'm sick."

"It 's easy to see that you are n't."

"I am, then—sick to death, Grace, of this situation. I can't keep my mind on my work. I can't think of anything but you and how to bring things round again. Now, darling girl, I have something to say, and I want you to hear me out before you bring in anything of your own. Because, little one, I 'm getting to know you. Words count a lot with you. You say something,—it may be just a whim that makes you,—and then you feel you 've got to stick to it, because to give it up would look like weakness. So don't say a word before I 've finished telling you my plan.

"What 's going to save us, Grace? We can't go on like this, all tangled up in a quarrel about God almighty himself does n't know what! The moment has come when the building 's afire and we 've got to jump. We can't stop to unpick knots; we 've got to burst our way through the snarl. What are we waiting for to get away from this house and folks that you seem to hate so? The fifteenth of September? For what reason, will you tell me? Has it occurred to you

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that we don't have to? Come with me quietly and be married, to-day, to-morrow, or Thursday, and on Saturday we 'll start for Europe. What do you say? No, don't speak yet. The moment we 've done that, don't you see, all this won't count any more than rain in the sea. We shall be bride and groom beginning our life together. You don't know me in the part of that happy man. You 'll see whether I 'm in earnest about wanting to make you happy. We 'll have the good old days of the *Pretoria* over again, only that I can take care of you as I want to, and show that it amounts to something to be the sweetheart and wife of Clarence Overcome."

The emotional inflections of his voice reminding him of the early morning thoughts in praise of eloquence, he reached after a little poetry:

"You 've told me your love for Italy. I 've only been in London for a few days, on business. You can show me your Italy. We 'll do the thing in style, Grace. What 's that passage about 'a villa on Lake Como, Pauline'? We 'll take one. Then there 's Venice and gondolas, Naples and Vesuvius, Rome and ruins, Florence and what-not, towers and temples, blue grottos and caves where dogs faint. We 'll do the whole thing. I 'll take six months off—I 'll take a year. You 'll see, you 'll see, unamiable person, what kind of a husband you 've got.

"No, don't speak yet. Don't speak at all, Grace. Just look at me! No, don't even look. You don't

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have to make the smallest sign. Leave it all to me. Only don't holler when I come with horses and carriage, and pick you up and carry you off to be married. Pretend to faint. That will be all the sign I want that you 're not so cruel as to wish to break my heart." He stopped and watched.

Grace, with her book on her lap, had been fingering the corner of a page, curling it into a tight roll. When he ceased talking, she smoothed it out, and, seeing that it would not lie flat, took the pains to curl it in the opposite way before she said, in her dry manner of that morning, out of keeping with the stain of tears plainly to be recognized on her eyelids:

"You are speaking to someone who is not there."

"What do you mean?" he followed her quickly.

"Is n't that clear? You are speaking to someone who you think will be moved by what you say, and I am not."

Her calm jerked him out of his.

"You look this minute as if you 'd cried your eyes out," he said, with a tempestuousness not free from petulance; "you look as if you 'd half-way gone into a decline with grief, and you talk to me like that, as if you were perfectly indifferent! Child, can't you make up your mind to have a little mercy on me as well as yourself?"

Again she took her time before speaking, and during the silence ran a careful forefinger round and round a patch of light on her knee. It was nearing

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noon. They sat in a tent of shade, but through rents here and there sunshine rained down, forming little pools; now and then, at a rustling, all these flecks of fairy gold would swing and float, unite and sever, then lie still again and shine tremulously. Wind and sun, it all kept on in beauty and gladness around these two, whose more pressing affairs made it unimportant to them. After the gesture of brushing away the sunbeam, Grace clasped her hands to keep them quiet.

"You need have no anxiety for me. I shall do very well, I think," she said, with more of her unfeeling calm. "As for you—" Did a little emotion creep into her voice, or was it an increase of coldness, which produced the same effect? "As for you, I am not afraid of breaking your heart. What you must do is take the steamer on Saturday in any case, and go off for a diversion from your cares. You may on board meet just the right person to transfer your affections to."

Red stared at her. The last sentence forced him to keep still while he revolved it. Then he burst forth, almost as much in relief as in anger:

"Is *that* what the matter is? Who 's been talking to you?"

"A thing that everybody knows is not easily kept secret."

"Nobody in this house did it, all the same. I know how you got it. When did she do it? I should like to see her letter of lies. Now, just listen to my side

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of the story, and see whether you 've got anything to feel sore about. It 's true that I was in love with her. Why should I have told you about it, just to upset you? I made a fool of myself; I won't conceal it. And what did I get? Fairness? Decent consideration? She 'd promise one minute to marry me; she 'd take my gifts fast enough; but she could n't treat me fairly even when she was letting me kiss her to heart's content. She played with me like the damned flirt she is. She 's been in Canada, where she got a fancy for titles. A Canadian friend with a handle to his name came to town,—a little insignificant, high-nosed stick-in-the-mud,—and I was made a supernumerary, a back number. The Canadian was played off on me, and I on the Canadian. Whether she really thought she 'd like to be called 'Lady,' or just wanted a chance to refuse a title, I was made ridiculous. My objections to the part were funny, her way of looking. When I 'd lose my temper I was funny. When I 'd had enough of it, I broke away, as sick of Grace Fenn, I swear to you, as I ever expect to be of anything in my life. The thing ended—it ended right there. When I 've had enough I 've had enough. Go too far with me, and it 's like the scales: you overload one plate, the other comes up. It is n't safe, with me, to go beyond the line I draw. If you feel the least inclined to jealousy on her account, you can drop it. I hated her when I ran away to try to change the current of my thoughts; I 've hated her ever since. She could

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no more get me back than bring the dead to life. She 's tried, and tried her best. It would have done you good to hear me talk to her in our last interview —which took place not so awfully long ago."

"You are mistaken; it would not have done me good. It does not flatter or gratify me, whatever your righteous motives for wrath, to have been taken up as an instrument with which to punish another person."

"My God, Grace, this fighting with words will drive me insane! You were not an instrument, you were a godsend! After that empty-headed bunch of vanity, your modesty, your reserve, your quiet sweetness and refinement—is it a wonder I tumbled head over heels in love with you? and in a way as different as you are different? 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks'—I was after you like a shot. You remember? You don't doubt, do you, Grace, that I fell in love with you?"

There was an interval while, again curling a leaf of her book, she appeared to consider the thing impartially.

"No, I don't suppose I do. The trouble is that I don't want it now. There is just one thing I want. I have told you what it is. I want to go away from here."

"Look me in the face, Grace. Do you care one little bit about me?"

She complied without hesitation with his request to

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look him in the face, and in her eyes of determined detachment the glimmer grew of a tricksy expression with which he was familiar. She smiled oddly.

"Which do I have to say in order to be let go?"

"You mean you 're ready to lie to get your own way. You can lie, but your eyes can't. Say what you please, your eyes tell a different story, in spite of all you do to conceal it."

"I know—I know I can't conceal the fact that I cried all night. It was dreadful—but the dreadfulest thing about it is that I could never make you understand why I cried like that. It was like forest fires, that rage hour after hour. Then they are put out with damp sand. All I have here now"—she pressed her hands one over the other against her breast—"is damp sand. It 's a wonderful relief. The fire is out to the last spark, Clarence. You had better believe it, and give me the pennies that I regard as belonging to me, and let me go to my sister; for I shall never be the slightest good to you in the world after this."

He burst into a laugh whose ring would have made the children uneasy in the house of the ogre who had given them shelter for the night.

"You are speaking to someone, my love, who is n't there! No, O snow-peaks and frost-bites! If you think that when you 've got me where I can't live without you I 'm going to give you up with less fuss than a tooth, you are n't thinking of Overcomes. I 'd have to be a thundering fool, and you 'd be the first

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to think me one. Child, can't you see? You 're indulging a mood, a whim; you don't know yourself what you want. And you expect me to act as if it were my mood, too, my whim, and I didn't know either what I wanted. What will happen if I let you go? Nobody can tell. While you 're here, though you 're not always a perfect joy, I know at least where to find you. If you go—the possibility is there 'll be one flat-chested old maid the more in the world. If you stay, there 'll be a wedding in September, if not before."

He really did not see why she should all at once be blazing angry. He had not meant any melodramatic threat of force: he was expressing a mere incapacity to believe she was in earnest; expressing the assurance merely, derived from a varied experience of the feminine character, that by September—or before—her mood would have changed. But it was as if he had touched a match to pine-pitch. She started to her feet, and stood quivering like a little race-horse, transfixing him with coruscating eyes.

"What will happen in September I do not know," she said, with lips that made missiles of the words as they gushed from that agitated fountain. "I may succeed in getting away from here before that, or not —God knows. I shall do my best. But you have methods in this house that I am not used to and am no match for. Don't think I don't know that I am watched and followed, robbed and deceived. I 'm in

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a trap; I 'm in a prison. You count on my not having friends or money. It looks just now as if I had n't any, I own. Still, it may turn out you were wrong. But about one thing nothing will make any difference, and that is about marrying you, Red Overcome. You can keep me here under guard, and you may be able to get me to the altar; but you can't make me say 'Yes.' I will say 'No'—'No'—'No!' I will say it aloud. I will scream it before everybody. I am not a hen, you will find out. Do you see this?" She raised her right hand; though so delicate, it for the moment looked steel-strong. "I swear it! By everything I believe in, I swear it. Now don't you think you might as well let me go?"

He had been watching her from under a gathering frown, at first of puzzlement, and gradually, as her tirade progressed toward its climax, of less scattered and floating emotions. She looked back at him with eyes of intense and indignant earnestness, recalling her father's when he had denounced a tyranny or declared a bitter truth.

The jilted man must obviously be allowed a little time to grasp the new ideas presented to him; but he adjusted himself more quickly than might have been expected.

"Yes," he said, breathing audibly, "I do."

He was angry, too, no doubt; but, instead of growing redder, like her, he had grown pale; rigidity invested him to the lips. His "Yes, I do," would have

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given her greater cheer, had he not at the moment of saying it looked so dangerous. Still, the words that set her free had been spoken. It becoming certain, in a moment more, that there was to be no outburst from him of reproach or pleading, her relief was increased on the one side, and on the other her uneasiness.

"When do you want to go?" he asked, in a manner that indicated how definitely she had—by words that never could be recalled or forgiven—cut herself loose from him and placed herself beyond some mysterious pale.

"Oh, any time," she said eagerly. "To-day, to-morrow. It does n't matter so much, if I only know that I surely can go."

"Will Saturday do? I can't very conveniently leave before that."

It was her turn, taken aback, to be silent while she tried to grasp a new idea.

"No," she said; "I am going alone. I wish to go alone."

"I am going with you. You are going to be escorted to your sister's door and deposited there like a bundle of returned goods."

She looked in his eyes for help to understand him; but that peculiar and baffling withdrawal of expression had taken place which made him appear like a stranger—a sinister stranger this time, a bad stranger.

"No," she said, more firmly; "I am going by myself."

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"You 're going with me, or you 're not going!"

The hint of brutality in his peremptory voice affected her very curiously. There could be no mistake about his being blackly angry. The tide of red had returned to his face, darker than ever; the veins in his forehead stood forth, swollen and purplish; he too could snarl with his eyebrows, she saw, like Alec Overcome.

"Why should I trust you?" he came out violently. "How do I know where you intend to go? I know mighty little about you, it turns out. You 're going with me—or you 're not going."

"Very well," said Grace, after another silence; "I will be ready for Saturday."

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CHAPTER XXIII

IT seemed strange to be quietly and openly folding her things and laying them in her trunk. She felt like one who by accident had spoken the magic word at which the enchantment snaps and the barriers fall. She kept herself reminded, however, that she was still in the house of the enchanter.

Clarence did not come home to dinner; but she found those of the family who assembled around the table informed of her approaching departure, and in a general way, with unobtrusive exceptions, unexpectedly pleasant about it. The understanding was, as she quickly gathered, that she was going to her family for a little visit before her marriage. Theresa professed to regard it as a very natural desire on her part, and was kind and sympathetic. Seeing it as an act of generosity to let the one whom she was disappointing save his pride as he chose, Grace lent herself to the deception like the little woman of the world she at her moments aspired to become. A good deal was said about missing her.

It was a saving to the sensibilities that Theresa, who must have known the truth, should pretend thus hardily, and free her from the dread of reproaches or inter-

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cession; but Theresa's eyes!—those frank, good-humored eyes! . . . Grace could not adjust her ideas to the mendacious eyes of Theresa.

Rebecca, from her place farther down and across the table, gave her a long, steady look of indefinable import, but turned away as soon as Grace's glance urged hers to be more explicit; and when Grace, after dinner, approached her, she avoided Grace, consistently with her habit.

After the lights were out, and Grace lay in bed, wakeful for a long time beside the slumbering Sita, and thinking of a great many things that she had put away from her to think over more pertinently in the undisturbed, secret, and counsel-bringing hours of the night, she tried to interpret Rebecca's look as conveying sober congratulations at her prospect of escape. In that connection, she reviewed all that had passed the night before between herself and Rebecca; she recalled their words with reasonable exactitude.

From much thinking, a little cold place came to be at the mysterious spot—in heart or brain or spine—which we will call the central seat of her.

The hour at which Aunt Dolores was wont to start for mass found Grace listening for the rustle that revealed her passage down the stairs. She waylaid her, to say good-by a little personally and privately. A beam of genuine tenderness came into Aunt Dolores' face as Grace pressed her soft, plump hands. The

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two looked at each other for a moment; then Grace threw her arms around Dolores, and Dolores, noiselessly in tears, returned the embrace. They did not speak, as if they had feared to be overheard, or as if both had known that they understood by touch better than by words—until Grace said, as so often before, "Pray for me!" She added, underlining the word, and ceasing suddenly to smile, *"Really!"*

She reëntered her room with a lighter heart, as if she had begged pardon and been forgiven: because she had not been able to exclude contempt from her young judgment of Aunt Dolores, and with growing just a few hours older she had seen her contempt in a new light. Dolores, well born, Southern, constitutionally indolent, had known bitter poverty in the period of her first widowhood. She had been brought low indeed, when Uncle Miles intervened. So that now, with the growing languor of age upon her, to be housed, fed, kept warm, sheltered, had a value to her not to be estimated by those who were different. The money belonging to her by right was involved in Overcome enterprises; she could be ruined by a turn of the wrist if she attempted to extricate it. Not brave in the least, she took the burden of her cross to the Church each day, and got reconcilement there, even love for her enemies, some of them, to whom she had grown accustomed. For she was an affectionate soul: she dressed dolls for Zip, who was impudent to her; she darned laces for Theresa, who did not reprove

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Zip. Grace made apology to her in her heart—while determining never to become like her.

Later on this same day, Grace slipped upstairs to inform Aunt Marinda personally of her departure, and to take leave—fondly, without witnesses—of her as well as dear, decent Nora, who, if her room had been searched for the missing money, had given no sign of knowing it.

Grace had delicately tried for the favor of the invalid, pleasing her with little attentions, offerings of her favorite pansies and old-fashioned peppermints; reading aloud to her from the Bible, which voluntary task the old lady utilized in part to the child's own profit: Grace, in her opinion, did not show sufficient diligence in the reading of her Bible.

On the Sunday before, after the memorable church-going with Sita, Grace had gone to sit a while with Aunt Marinda, largely to escape the others, but also for the pleasure of being able to answer Aunt Marinda's slightly severe question: "Have you been to church?" for once in the affirmative.

She had found Uncle Sylvanus occupying the rocking-chair on the other side of the cold stove, and had been happy over this, because, if she was before long not to see him ever again, she would have liked to leave with this Overcome who was so little of an Overcome the knowledge of her affectionate respect.

He was more responsive to her conversational lures

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that afternoon than he had ever been, with the rest of the family present. He remembered her interest in the story of the young Jesse who delivered his brethren from captivity; he went far back in his life to tell something of his part in the story—the hardships of his boyish lot until Brother Jesse came to the rescue. The regard of both the old people for the memory of their big brother was touching. Grace noticed the soft texture of Sylvanus' large-veined old hands, the delicacy of his features beside the ruggedness of his sister's, and believed that nature had had what are called "absences" when she mixed the elements that formed those two. The old man's smile, in response to her smile at taking leave of him, had been plainly the conveyance of an old man's blessing. It warmed her troubled heart to feel that not quite every relation of hers with the people of that house had been a failure.

As she mounted the second flight of stairs between her floor and Aunt Marinda's, a voice reached her more and more distinctly, issuing from the high room: an unusual event, because Aunt Marinda's door was provided with weather-strips to keep out the draught —or keep in the noises. The voice, raised above ordinary pitch, quavered like organ-tones; remarkably, the words borne on that solemn and powerful breath, able to pierce the door, sounded to Grace's ear like, "'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Beth-

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saida!'" But they could not very well be that, she thought.

She hesitated; then, jumping over the process of making up her mind, knocked. Nora opened the door a very little way, but, seeing who was there, threw it wide open for Grace to enter.

Dolores was in the room, too. Her face and Nora's both wore that blankness which serves to cover perturbation. Aunt Marinda was perceptibly in a state of excitement: her cheek-bones burned, her cavernous eyes were alight; her black cap had been shaken out of the ideal symmetrical squareness on her head. With the same fine and unaccustomed vigor exhibited by her voice, her hands grasped the ends of her arm-rests, and appeared like an eagle's claws, superb in some piece of decorative carving. It was borne in upon Grace by the sight of her that the old lady must have been having one of those "times" to which she had heard reference made. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" might, after all, have been her cry a minute ago.

Uncertain what else to do, Grace proffered her hand. Aunt Marinda looked at her for some time before moving: she might have been trying to see her through a fog. She quieted down marvelously during that wait, and when she said, "It 's Gracie. How do you do?" and gave her hand in reply, it was done naturally; she appeared her ordinary self again.

Dolores rose with the alacrity of a guilty gladness

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to yield to another her place of patient and respectful audience. After an expressive sign covertly to Grace, she tiptoed toward the door, carrying the narrowed shoulders and drawn-in neck of one who scuttles to shelter out of a storm. Her impulse, it became evident directly, was shared by the sturdy Nora—who acted upon it, however, in a manner more accordant with her stoutness. She straightened a few things on the little stand; she shook into shape the cushion on which Dolores had sat; then, still affecting to be busy, she set watch for Grace's eye, which having caught, she spoke to it with her own little black-lashed blue eye, to the purpose of making herself excused for taking advantage of the young lady's fortunate coming to gain a respite from the mistress's tongue. Was n't she young and strong and fresh to the task? Would n't she be willing to sit with the old woman a bit and give the others a rest? Of course she would, being a humane and Christian girl. And Nora softly vanished through the door to her own room, closing it after her all but a crack—which slender reservation represented her unforgotten responsibility as a nurse.

"Dolores is a coward!" announced Miss Overcome sonorously, looking at one door. "Nora does n't wrestle with sin as she ought to!" she declared, looking at the other door—and, after a challenging look all around the room, lapsed into a brown study.

There was a chair with a hard, straight, high back of puritanical look, for which Grace had a liking be-

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cause of its low seat. This she drew close to Aunt Marinda's arm-chair, placed herself under the old woman's eyes, and laid a hand on her knee, with a not very clearly formed theory that by mere sympathetic nearness she might woo her from her mood.

Aunt Marinda looked at her broodingly, and decided to take her into her confidence.

"This house," she said, "is going straight to hell!"

Grace's beseeching gesture and murmur of protest did not check, but fired her to livelier fulmination.

"Is there one person in this house who lives as if he had a soul to save? Is there one person who you 'd think had ever heard of the kingdom?" she inquired, and, receiving no reply, proceeded with fearful fluency: "I 'm not speaking of Brother Sylvanus; I 'm not speaking of Dolores; I 'm not speaking of Nora—though if they are n't careful they 'll land in hell too. I 'm speaking of Jesse's tribe. They 've builded them temples in groves on high places to false gods, and deserved the Lord's curse. Behold! they 've let the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, like thorns and weeds, choke the good seed that is spoken of in the parable. . . . I don't see what they 're coming to!" she dropped from the biblical into the vernacular. "I don't see what they 're coming to! To eat and drink and dress up, turn night into day and day into night, with theaters and dancing and feasting—it 's all they seem to live for, and I 'm like a lonely

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sparrow on the house-top, preaching, preaching, 'Flee from the wrath to come! Flee from the wrath to come!' and it does n't do a particle of good!"

Grace got possession of one of her hands, and by a yearning pressure tried to quiet her. But the gentle contact had no effect beyond making the old lady more exactly aware of the personality of her listener.

"I know, Gracie," she said, "I know it looks to some folks—maybe it does to you—as if I must be crazy to have these fits when I can't keep from coming out with what I keep inside of me the rest of the time. But it piles up, it piles up, till it reaches my throat and chokes me. Why is n't it my duty as much as the prophets of old to warn these people in the name of the Lord? Only, there 's no one to listen. They run the moment I begin. And what I tell them is true as Gospel. They 're going the broad way to perdition, every one of them. They don't care for anything in the world, that I can see, but just the things of this world. And it 's the deceitfulness of riches that has done it, Gracie." She had an effect again of taking Grace into her confidence. "The trouble begins with working so hard for money that your whole soul goes into it; then, after getting the money, you feel big and important for having got it; it looks large to you, and you look large to yourself because of it; you put it before everything else; till, when it comes to the choice between money and doing right, between money and the good of your soul, you choose money

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every time. I 'd like to smash their golden calf for them!" she exclaimed truculently, tightening her fist into hammer shape.

Grace, to divert her, used the magic of a name.

"Your brother Jesse," she began—"your brother Jesse, the crayon portrait in the drawing-room shows that he was a very fine man—a man, I should say, of very fine character. I—I like to think of him; I should like to hear more about him."

But the old lady disappointingly shook her head, and looked sternly despondent.

"No!" she said, with firm justice. "He was a fine man at the beginning. Jesse was as good a boy as ever lived. But the root of all the evil in this house was in him. He was the first to get caught by the lust for money-making. He grew proud of what he 'd accomplished all by himself, forgetting it was part the Lord helped him, and part the devil set up riches for his temptation. And then he went and married Inez Maria. After that there was no hope."

"She died when Clarence was a baby," said Grace tentatively, invincibly curious to hear more of that Inez Maria whose dark eyes in the crayon portrait hanging beside the portrait of Jesse reminded her of Theresa's.

"Yes, too late to do any good!" Aunt Marinda followed on vengefully. "She ought to have died before she brought her streak of black-haired bandit blood into the honest and upright Overcome blood. Where

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she got it from I don't know. A mean character. While she lived we did n't get an awful lot of good of being Jesse's brothers and sister, but after she died he made up for it. He thought a heap of his natural kin. He had us come and live with him; he was good to us. Brother Jesse thought a heap of his only sister, and was proud to show it; and it 's because of him a good deal that I fidget so up here when I feel them all going wrong downstairs—all his children and children's children, going as wrong as wrong can be. They 're a different sort of young people from what we were in our youth. They have no respect for the old, no reverence for anything; they 've no mind for good works, no care about doing right—with their indecent low-cut dresses and red hair-ribbons and ungodly bedizenings! Material things, I heard a minister call them once—material things, that 's all they think about. To lie comfortable, to dress vain, to eat rich, make a show, have a good time, serve the flesh, and their immortal souls—go ahead as if they had n't got any!"

"Aunt Marinda,"—Grace stroked the aged hand,—"things change with time passing, and the young people of to-day, I know, are not the same as you remember. But perhaps some of them care about the same things essentially, only they have a different way of showing it."

"Gracie, don't try to turn me away from anger; don't try to excuse them; don't think you know better

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than I." Aunt Marinda stiffened to grimness. "I sit here, and it comes up to me like the reek of something rotting—all the wickedness in this house. Down below me there are liars, and blasphemers, and extortioners, and oppressors of the poor," she enumerated with vim, "and robbers, and adulterers, and murderers! Everything except pickpockets and desecrators of graves! And I 'm not sure even of that. Jesse Black, or his brother Red either, would desecrate a grave in a minute, or pick a pocket, if they happened to want to and it was so they could escape the law.

"You need n't wonder to hear me talk so strong, and call them names like murderers and generation of vipers. I know what I 'm talking about. Those two and Lonzo have blood on their heads, as sure as Cain. Their brother Miles would be alive to-day if it was n't for them. I mean it. Don't let anybody deceive you. They wanted to make him sign a document that he was n't willing to sign. Brother Jesse, so 's to keep the business together, left all so no one could act for himself, but they had to agree. So they had to get Miles's signature before they could go ahead, and he held out. They knew he had heart trouble; they knew they 'd no business to worry or frighten him. If there was one thing Miles was frightened of, it was of being frightened. And that 's what they played upon, making believe to be just fooling. You could hear them laugh to the top

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of the house. I had my legs then. I went half way down the stairs to listen and try to make out what it was all about. They did n't frighten him into signing, but they did fuss him into a heart-spell.

"One moment you could hear their coarse racket, down in that room they call the den—the next moment it was still as death. I ran down the rest of the stairs, and so did Dolores, who 'd been listening too. Miles was lying on the carpet, and his three brothers were standing round, not laughing much at that exact moment. They 'd done for Miles; the doctor could n't bring him out of it. You 'd have thought that to see the result of their wickedness right under their eyes might have given them a change of heart. But I never heard any one of them take any blame; I never saw any fruits meet for repentance. They called it nothing but an accident, and did n't let it bother their consciences. I don't know but it was troubling so much about that—about the hardening of heart of Jesse's sons—brought on my affliction. I don't know but it was that."

Grace had buried her face in her hands. Aunt Marinda's eyes were fixed upon her, unseeing; but after some minutes the picture of her penetrated, stirring wonder and raising doubts in Aunt Marinda's mind. The wind of inspiration, the accumulated passion, that made the silent old countrywoman periodically violent and voluble, was dying down. Looking at Grace, she felt uncertain as to what she could have

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been saying that should make this child crouch and shiver like one in pain. She essayed the difficult business of recalling her words, and during the mental labor of disentangling the relations of this thing to that thing continued to look at Grace with eyes of compunction for having made her feel bad—the flower-sweet young girl with her pretty ways.

Along with the sorrow for having made her feel bad, there was in the increasingly wistful withered face a general sorrow for her because she was young and inexperienced, and would have to encounter so many troubles, make so many blunders, feel bad so many times, before she was an old woman near her release. They had a great deal in common, this veteran in life and that novice, in having one thing: at the heart of each nature, that mysterious needle, wavering but constant, which points always toward the same star. Grace felt a hand laid on her hair.

"You feel bad, because you 're engaged to be married to Red," Aunt Marinda said in her simple customary way. "Perhaps I ought n't to have talked as I did. I had forgotten, when I did it. But now it 's done, I 'm not sorry I told you. It 's best to know a man before you take him for better, for worse. I 've felt sorry, each time I 've seen you, to think of you marrying Red."

Grace had looked up, and exhibited dry eyes, after all. She clasped Aunt Marinda's hand again, lovingly.

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"Have you heard, Aunt Marinda, that I am going away?"

Aunt Marinda mused, and while doing it felt of her head, straightened her cap, and looked an amenable Don Quixote again, with lance at rest after a royal bout.

"Yes, I remember now. Dolores told me you were going home to visit your sister, and coming back in time to be married."

"I am not coming back, Aunt Marinda. I am not going to marry Red. I don't want to talk about my reasons for this. I had my reasons before I heard what you have to say of him. I came up this afternoon to bid you good-by, because it might be the only chance I should have. I want you to know, Aunt Marinda, that I have *appreciated* you, and that I shall remember a great many things you have said to me which will help me ever so much. I will read my Bible oftener, because you want me to."

"That 's a good girl, Gracie. If you remember it 's God's Word, you ought to want to read it. You 'll see that by and by it 'll grow to be your greatest comfort. And you 're not going to marry Red, did you say? And you 're going away from us for good and all? Well, well, this is news. I hope you are n't having any big heart-ache about it, Gracie, are you? Though I 'm sorry for you if you are, I can't help feeling glad, too. You deserve a better man."

"There 's nothing I want to say about it, Aunt

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Marinda. I just want to talk with you for a little while about other things."

As if in search of a fresh, unrelated subject, Grace let her eyes roam around the room; or she might have been taking that circular look with a view to impressing on her mind for remembrance the things she was perhaps seeing for the last time: the stuffed dog on top of the wardrobe, the copper warming-pan in the corner, the box for firewood pasted over with bright pictures. When she spoke, however, it was not clear that she had been doing anything but summon up the special kind of courage needed to ask an unusual question.

"You have lived so long, and seen so much—thought so much, too," she fumbled for a beginning. "You are very wise—I feel that you are. I feel as if there were many things you could tell me that would help me, if I only had the sense to ask them. There is one thing particularly that you could tell me, perhaps. There is a passage in the Bible—you who have read the Bible so constantly, and meditated upon it—there is a passage that I wish you would tell me what you think of. It is this: 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' Haven't you, Aunt Marinda, ever seen the seed of the righteous, the children of just people, brought to where they were forced actually to beg their bread? It seems so unlikely, somehow, that because your father was a good

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man you, as a reward for his deeds, should be saved from the dreadfulness of having to beg. If a person could believe the Bible absolutely, and feel that confidence when he had to set out alone, for instance, without money, without knowing in the least what he was going to do next, oh, how differently he would feel, how wonderful it would be! What do you think about it, Aunt Marinda? 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' I 'd give anything to know."

The old woman appeared for a space to be thinking. Perplexity grew in her face, as if from a difficulty in remembering, or concentrating her mind. An unusual effort of brain was reflected on her forehead. She said at last, honestly:

"I don't think I ever noticed, Gracie, whether the paupers I 've known about had good fathers. The folks who were on the town were mostly a pretty shiftless sort, which shows they had n't been brought up right—and that was n't to their parents' credit. But I don't know, Gracie; I don't know from personal experience. This I do know"—her voice reacquired some of its earlier vigor: "that if you serve God you can trust Him. We 've got to trust Him, and take what He sends in the right spirit, as being what is good for us."

"I know, Aunt Marinda. I know that 's the right way of looking at it—for religious people. But it 's

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dreadful, all the same—it 's dreadful to be altogether without money."

She covered her face again, as if to shut out a fearful prospect, or to shut in what further there was to say on the subject, and keep a hold on herself until this wave, too, of panic and woe should have passed.

Aunt Marinda felt herself as not having been adequate, as not having given the proper comfort. She groped for some way of meeting the necessity of the hour more handsomely. Affection went out from her toward that young brown head bowed upon slender young hands which, she had an uncomfortable suspicion, smothered tears. In search of ideas, she revolved and then repeated aloud the child's last words:

"It 's dreadful to be without money. Yes, so it is. Who are you thinking of so situated, and feeling bad about it? It is n't you, Gracie, that needs money?"

Grace moved her head in a manner that could not be interpreted as meaning yes or meaning no. The first tremble of a glimmering current of understanding was yet established between her and Aunt Marinda.

"Is that what you have on your mind—that you need money? How does it come? I thought you had plenty."

"Oh, Aunt Marinda, I had n't any thought of asking you when I came up here. But if you could—oh, if you just could, without telling anybody, let me have enough to pay my expenses down to Welaka,

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where my sister lives. I did have some money—plenty; but it has been stolen. No, I don't mean that, but— If you could let me have forty or fifty dollars, in a few days I would return it—and it would make such a difference to me! I could almost believe that miracles were worked for the sake of the righteous, to keep their children from having to beg their bread. My father was so good!"

"I 'd do it in a minute, Gracie; I 'd do it in a minute, though I don't seem to understand how it comes that you— No matter, for the present. But I have n't got any money to use. I never have, though I 've got quite a good deal in the bank and in the business. They take care of my money for me; they draw out my board-money and they pay Nora's wages. I have n't got a cent of money by me."

"Never mind, then, dear Aunt Marinda. Thank you just as much. Forget that I asked you. It won't make any difference, really, I suppose. I shall have to launch my little bark on an unknown sea in the dark, in any case."

"Look here, Gracie. I have n't any money, but I 've got something else just as good, I guess, for you can raise money on it. Now, listen, and don't make any noise." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "You go and look under the bed,—lift the valance, so I can see too, and direct you,—and you 'll see plenty of boxes and things. The one I want you to pick out

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is a good-sized green cardboard box. You pull that out and undo it, and you 'll see in it a brown cedar-wood box that was a cigar-box. Bring it to me."

So utterly had Grace a moment past given up the expectation of anything fortunate happening to her in this house, that at the sudden stepping into an old-fashioned story book, with its fairy godmother and fulfilment of forlorn hopes, the very quickening of her heart warned her to wait before she rejoiced, and make sure the treasure was not a fusty nut. Her hands trembled as she raised the valance, exposing just such a still-life composition as the old country-woman's words had evoked. The apple-green box was easy to find. With fingers clumsy from their very eagerness, Grace at last had the dusty string unknotted, and lifted the cover.

It was packed full with rolls of dress-pieces, balls of worsted, bundles of newspaper clippings and tissue-paper patterns, a collection of corks, indescribable miscellanies—but the cedar box was plainly in sight. This she brought to the waiting old lady, who pulled off the flimsy yellow ribbon holding it shut, and turned back the hinged lid, faintly fragrant still of cedar and Havana tobacco. This box also was crammed with things: the eye was first caught by a glass knob with a bright flower embedded in it, like a fly in amber, fit to charm the eyes of a child; caught, next in order, for its strangeness, by a shape-

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less lump of blackened metal, which Aunt Marinda, forgetting the more important thing, lifted and fingered with curiosity.

"We 've never been sure what it was, but Jesse thought it was the old sugar-bowl melted down in the fire when our house burned to the ground. He picked it up out of the ruins." She was lapsing into a dream of past things, but recalled herself. "Now, this is what I want you to see."

It was a round wooden pill-box of an old kind, with a faded inscription on a time-yellowed label. The cover squeaked as Aunt Marinda screwed it off; a nest of pink cotton-wool was revealed. With two brown fingers she pinched up a wad of this, and her face broke into a smile at the incongruous sparkle of white fire that ensued.

"Jesse gave it to me," she said, taking out the flashing brooch—"the first birthday I had after I came to live with him. I did n't want him to; I said it was n't appropriate for me. But he said it was, and besides, he said, it was n't just a piece of jewelry, it was a piece of property. The value of diamonds does n't vary, he said, and these are good ones; they 're the real Brazilian. You can turn them into money any time you want to, he said. I wore it a few times to please him. Theresa seemed to think I ought to give it to her after my misfortune; then she wanted me to give it to Pinky on her twenty-first birthday; then she wanted me just to let the family dress up in

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it once in a while. But I don't see it. When I 'm gone will be time enough. So I keep it where the sight of it won't be a temptation to anybody.

"Now, Gracie, you take this and raise money on it. I don't know just how much it 's worth. Jesse did n't know, either; it was all he could collect for a bad debt. Mind you, I don't give you this breast-pin; I want you to give it in security for a loan, and then you send the receipt to me, and I 'll make *them* redeem it. They 'll be mad, I guess; but I 'm not afraid of them, single or in a regiment!"

The white fires were again extinguished under a pinch of pink cotton; Aunt Marinda screwed down the lid with a squeak, and handed the box to Grace.

"You put that in your pocket," she said briskly.

"Oh, Aunt Marinda!" Grace was pressing the bewildered benefactress in her arms,—but regardfully, so as not to break her,—crushing a smooth teary cheek against the country cheek that would carry its weather-brown to the grave. "You will never know what you have done for me! God bless you! God bless you, for your dear, dear kindness. I will make sure you get back your brooch, never fear—without any of them knowing about it, either. I will find a way. All there is now is to be very, very careful, dear, and to remember and not to say a single word about this to anybody."

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CHAPTER XXIV

EARLIER than usual in the morning, Grace was preparing to go out. Sita asked, as if nothing could have been more natural:

"Where are you going?"

"Out, Sita—simply out, for the fresh air."

"I guess I 'll come too," said Sita sweetly. "Do you mind? I shall have so few more chances to go anywhere with you."

"Hurry and put on your hat!" said Grace, with equal sweetness.

At the first post-box, Grace whipped a letter out of the book she was returning to the public library, and pushed it under the metal flap.

"What was that?" inquired Sita in astonishment.

"What did I drop into the letter-box, do you mean? A ham sandwich, Sita!"

"When did you write it?" Sita's round-eyed stare, her abused air and tone, were fit to engender mirth.

Seizing Sita's hand, Grace, with unprecedented briskness, pulled her along at a run for the rest of the block, in an exuberance of high spirits that made her eyes dance and sparkle.

"I will tell you. I waited until you were asleep,

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Sita; then I crept out of bed so softly you would n't feel me—it took me five minutes. I went to my desk in the dark, I felt for the things I was going to need,—that took me ten minutes,—and I carried them into the sewing-room. There, by the light of those little candles I use to heat sealing-wax, I wrote a mysterious and interesting letter—the same you have just seen me post. And is n't it hard to think, Sita, that you can never know what was in it!"

"What was in it?" asked Sita, unabashed. "I don't believe a word you say. Who was it to?"

"I 'm going to let you guess. I must have a little fun with you while I can; for our days together, as you say, are numbered. And, Sita, since I 'm going away so soon, and the good influence I have had on you is about to cease, I feel as if I ought, like a good older sister, to condense in a precept or two all that my example might have still done toward forming your little character and improving your little manners. Yes? You are a nice girl, Sita, in a lot of ways. But you don't pay enough attention to the graces—and shall I say the amenities?—of life. For instance: you ought not to ask a person point-blank—*biff! bang!*—what was in a letter, or whom was she writing to? It is n't done in the best circles. Will you remember, dear little friend?"

"What *is* the matter with you, Grace Ingalis?" sputtered Sita, "What makes you so queer, all at once?"

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But Grace burst out laughing; and Sita, willing to see as a joke the admonishment just received, laughed with her.

They had retired to their room for the night, when Grace, seizing the first instant of an absence of Sita's, went with furtive haste to raise one of the window-shades and stand at the open window. Her heart was thumping. She lifted her arms to her head, as if in the act of taking out the comb to release her hair, and assumed against the yellow shine of the gas-lit chamber the shape, for a moment, of the classic amphora.

Almost instantly a light flashed, down in the street. The ordinary spectacle was offered of a man with a blazing inverted match guarded between hands curved like shells, and of a man's face alternately lighted and darkened as he puffed at the cigarette which with his lips he held in the flame. The cigarette lighted, the match went out; but Grace, with the illumined face printed on her brain,—the right face,—peered still, for a moment, at the darkly outlined shape it had returned to be. After a rapid but careful measuring with her eye of the distance between it and her, she flung toward it, outside the railing separating the Overcome yard from the side-street, a small white package which had sufficient weight to lend it speed and keep it true to direction—the weight, in fact, of an old-fashioned wooden pill-box containing an old

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brooch. The beats of her heart were smothering her.

"What 's the matter?" asked Sita, who had opened the door in time to see the motion of Grace's arm. "Why have you put the blind up? What are you standing at the window for? What did you throw out?"

Grace, still in the tremor and excitement of her success so far with this incredible adventure, and fairly dazed by the wonder of it being she,—she, having adventures, conceiving and carrying out intricate conspiracies,—turned to Sita with those same dancing and sparkling eyes, malicious, triumphant, teasing, of earlier in the day.

"Incorrigible Sita!" she cried. "Do you want to know what I was doing? What do you suppose? I picked up the fruit-skins that you, with careless charm, leave lying around on my half of the bureau, and threw them out where they won't mess me up. No! listen! here 's a better one: There was an enormous spider, black, with hairy legs, Sita, the kind you don't love, crawling on the bed. I caught it under a piece of tissue paper and threw it out. Or, listen, listen—this too is good: I threw pennies wrapped in a piece of paper to the organ-man with the monkey. No, that is n't so good, because of the time of day. Sita, I will drop my mask and confess my guilty secret: I threw a white rose to a troubadour out there serenading me. You thought it was the car-brakes screeching—it was his romantic voice!"

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"What *is* the matter with you to-day, Grace Ingalis? I don't believe you threw anything at all. But what makes you so queer, all at once? You make me want to shake you!"

Sita grasped Grace by the shoulders, and did shake her, gazing at her meanwhile with eyes in which resentment, suspicion, hatred, were mingled with a grudging love—mellow calf's-eyes, whose glance remained obtuse even while she did her best to sharpen it and search with it.

"Funny Sita!" cried Grace, and gave her a sudden kiss on the cheek—genuine—to reward her for not being any cleverer, also to make tiny amends to her for unreturned affection.

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CHAPTER XXV

ON the Friday evening distinguished as Grace's last evening, a goodly number of relatives and friends came to say good-by; and the occasion, aided by Theresa's social spirit and well supplied cupboards, took on, as did so often those informal Overcome gatherings, the aspect of a party. The effulgent yellow pearls were all in service; music flew from the piano at which confident amateurs succeeded one another. Around the glass doors, the older men smoked. The older women sat in the gallery and overlooked the fun on the floor, where things became livelier and livelier as the evening wore on, someone having suggested a cake-walk, for which someone else put up a prize; after which there was a varied exhibition of home talent, a good deal of extreme and foolish caricature, but some good comedy too, amid a chorus of laughter.

The scene was to Grace like something on the stage: already the cleft that there would be on the morrow seemed to lie between it and her. A hard excitement burned her nerves and dulled her to all but the importance of a few preëminent things: to appear as usual, to observe closely and not seem to be doing so, to watch the time, to watch for the chance.

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They had all been, in their way, polite and friendly, the relatives and acquaintances; had spoken of missing her, but saved demonstrations of regret, making light of the departure in view of the not distant return. She had taken it all with a smile of acceptance.

She made a slightly somber figure to-night among the young people, being in her traveling dress, while they were in their muslins and light silks. It was understood from this that her trunk was ready for an early start on the next day. No question but she was charming in the bronze silk poplin intended for her honeymoon—planned in the period when she aspired to be an enchantress, and believed in the legitimate efficacy of creamy lace and gilt buckles and artful contrasts of color, a point of rose to enliven brown. No question but she was charming. The brightness of her eyes, the bright constancy of her smile, called away attention to-night from the interesting touch of haggardness that more than one of the family had lately remarked upon.

She had not been willing to join in the agitations on the floor: to one person she had said that it was too warm, that her dress was too thick for it, that her shoes were too heavy; to another that she was tired and must try to be fresh for the next day. She sat with Mrs. Alonzo, finally, and looked down at the scene as if from a theater box. Mrs. Lonzo was a copious and not important talker; one could abstract

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one's mind without danger when she was once launched, if her subject failed to stimulate. Her second son had returned from his wedding journey, and the mother was giving the story of his affair from the beginning: her own first opinion of the young lady, her early objections, Len's knowledge of his own mind, her gradual coming round, the beatific ending. Her steady trickle lulled one like the purl of a brook. Clarence came in the midst of it, and held out his hand bluffly to Grace, inviting her to walk with him for the cake. It was the second time. She shook her head.

"I should appear too much of a fool. One is the worse fool, is n't one, for not knowing how to make a fool of oneself amusingly?"

"Oh, come on, Grace!"

"No. Go on, you, Clarence, and make an amusing fool of yourself with another girl."

After a moment, in which her attention had been pointedly devoted to Mrs. Lonzo, he left. She had in truth established herself at Mrs. Lonzo's side because of Red's effort to waylay her, corner her, get a moment's private audience from her. It was among her clearest purposes not to allow him to accomplish this. They had been conducting themselves since the final break like civilized persons, keeping up the right manner before the others—bandying as occasion rose their old style of jest, touched with bitterness on his side, on hers with irony, and on both sides an odd tranquillity.

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The excitement that possessed her left little room for any feeling but watchfulness and resolve. Only one hint had she had in three days that her heart lived. On the night before, the wind preceding a thunder-shower had moaned round the house; and as she lay in the dark, nervous from long wakefulness, a thought had sprung from that region where we are not the conscious masters: "It 's my soul wailing for its lost prince!" And then, from that same region: "Or it 's Red Overcome's soul searching for me!" Her flesh had crept, a wave of desire had swept over her, and she had been near the agony of tears again, when a gleam of sanity had cut down like a flashing sword between her lost prince and that Red Overcome of whom she was coldly afraid—afraid like the unhappy lady affianced to the mysterious Mr. Fox in the old tale, after she had espied the little livid severed hand with its load of stolen rings. . . . Things of the night, of the complex and confused nature of man, in whom the schism between heart and brain can be wide, between soul and flesh deep. . . . The return of day had mended it; from that region where we are the conscious masters, softness had been expelled. And now she sat beside Mrs. Alonzo, with a deep light in her eye, signalizing her sense of being mistress of the situation—oh, so much more than anybody dreamed!

Theresa joined them, and fell to talking with Carrie about the plans for the new house, discussing the merits of divers hard woods, different kinds of "fin-

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ish." Grace withdrew her attention altogether, to penetrate herself with the thought that this was her last evening in all her life among these people, and to say good-by to them in her mind.

Rebecca and Harvey were the ones at the moment parading before the judges—like peacocks, like Carmen arm in arm with her toreador on their way to the bull-ring. Sita was at the piano, strumming over and over, as if for a reel, one of the few pieces she knew by heart, and producing each time the same false bass-chord. Zip and Bobby chased each other, with the irrepressible cries of childhood, as if they had been in the school-yard during a recess, and their mother did not notice a noise to which she was accustomed; they were now and then ordered, in a casual way, by a cousin or an aunt, to shut up—but ineffectively.

A veil of kindness rose between Grace's eyes and these people. Clutched by the sense, tragic in youth, that she should never, never, see them again, she desired, with that disposition of hers to put her little inward house in order, to do them greater justice, to leave them, in any case, with wishes of gentle good will. She had said that they were different from her, warp and woof; but human beings are not different to that extent from one another. She thought it a pity that she could not have been patient, magnanimous. But was it not only because she was going away that she was willing to see them in softer colors? For nothing in the world, she reminded herself, would she

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have remained. No matter. Let them prosper, be happy, and the light that they needed—as everybody needs light!—come to them in its good time.

From her place she got a glimmer of the redness of the den, where a large crimson-shaded banquet-lamp near the door made vivid the crimson of the carpet. Six years ago three brothers had stood—"not laughing much at that exact moment"—around a fourth brother stretched on the floor. . . .

Now a glimpse could be caught of Miles' widow seated at a little table in the drawing-room, thoughtfully placing one card beside the other in a game of solitaire—or was she, in the inextinguishable love of life, telling her own fortune? Black Overcome and Lonzo were tranquilly smoking their cigars outside in the cool of the evening. Red Overcome, who had rejected Grace's advice to find himself a different partner, sat on the opposite side of the oval, oblivious enough, and full strong, in case of memory, against its importunity.

He was talking to the new daughter-in-law, the one of whom Carrie had just been telling. The young wife, who very likely was shy, had excused herself from taking part in the fun below, on the ground of weariness. From the distance Grace got a view of Red, in perspective, as a whole, like a picture. He was thinner; he had lost his fine color. Poor Clare! Be his niece's dreadful characterizations of him true or not, who could say that he was without sensibility?

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And how good to look at, in that manifest, manly way! Such a successful specimen of the genus man as he was! Well shaped head, well shaped everything, engaging—completely, even nobly a man, to the eye—until you had come to understand that his outlook on the opportunities of life was identical with that of beasts, whose way it is to get what they want if they can get it, and no necessity felt for justification. With this knowledge, you were enabled to see, as she was doing for the first time,—to see stamped on him physically, marking his brow, a limitation, a default.

His elbow rested on the railing, and his hand stroked his mustache—that masterful hand in whose exhibitions of strength she had delighted; that hand so admirably formed by nature to grasp and hold on.

"Uncle Red does n't let go, and if it looks as if he were letting go, look out! for he is n't—then particularly he is n't!" repeated Rebecca's voice in her brain.

Grace rose to her feet like one in a dream. It was the moment. Theresa deep in conversation with Carrie, Red absorbed in the youngest Mrs. Overcome and not looking her way, everybody engrossed and gay—

With quiet gait, though her knees trembled, she with inconspicuous presence glided behind the chairs of Theresa and Carrie; finished, without looking to the right or left, the half-circle of the gallery; and passed out through the door to the entrance-hall, wide

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open, like all the doors to-night in the rotunda. Quite empty, the hall,—God be praised!—and dim under the single lamp of colored glass.

So empty and quiet, and everything upstairs so quiet, too—it almost seemed as if she might safely venture to creep to her room and get a few things. She debated the point for half a minute; but, at a tiny sound from somewhere near, decided against it, and took a hurried step or two nearer the front door. Then her heart quite failed, because of the approaching muffled sound of feet. She stood still, to judge whether they were near enough already to make it too late. They were. She quietly turned the newel-post, and pretended that she had been starting up the stairs.

The door of Red's room opened so suddenly, one might say it was torn open; Red stepped into the hall. Her foot was on the bottom stair; she choked down her despair and smiled.

"At last!" he said. "I 've been trying all evening to get a word with you."

"I am very tired," she offered as an explanation of her withdrawal from the lights and noises.

"But you must n't go quite yet."

With a stride, he so placed himself as to shut off her way upstairs. She as quickly drew beyond arm's length from him, and was that much nearer the room she had just left.

"Grace! Do the thing that I beg of you to do!

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I pray! I entreat! Come back with me, and let them know we 've changed our minds, or some circumstance has risen to change our plans, and we 're not leaving to-morrow morning, after all. Be my good girl, Grace, and tell them; then let all this be as if it had n't been."

Without quite being humble, his voice, lowered to a whisper, was supplicating; his earnestness was compelling. But it did not get past the guard of one who in wisdom and solemn forethought had stopped her ears against all siren songs.

She looked at him as if such thickness of wit as he persistently showed made her hopeless, without making her unkind.

"You don't seem to understand. I don't seem able to make you!"

"Grace, I will do anything you say, anything you want me to. If ever a miserable offender loved a girl and wanted her love— Just in this one matter, listen to me and do as I ask you. Give up going to-morrow, and you will have no reason to repent; you will have a lamb in me—you will have anything you want."

"But, Clarence, the point is, I can't live near you; I can't breathe any longer. You ought n't to have lied to me, you see. In an atmosphere of lies I can't breathe; that 's the whole of it. I can't help it—I am so made. I can't live!"

"You talk as if everybody did n't lie! Everybody

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lies, you two-days-old kitten—I rather less than other men."

"Not everybody. My father never lied."

"Don't expect me to be like your father. Men in love are a different animal. I had lived thirty years, Grace, before knowing you. Won't you remember it, and hold the hope that your ideas will percolate gradually, and I shall know finally just what you do want!"

"If you knew, Clarence, how much I want to be just to you—to be fair. Harsh and final judgments are a cruel folly, always. And I myself so blind, so full of faults! But this is what I apparently can't make you understand: that in order to be just, in order to do anything that is right and real, I must first be away from you. You must let me go."

"Here we are back again at the old turn in the road, the old struggle. For God's sake, Grace, get a little sense; get a little forbearance; get this thing into the right light. This evening, if you would only realize it, decides our whole lives. We can still be as happy as we meant to be—perfectly happy, little one; but if you persist, and our lives are ruined,—as they will be, I warn you—mine as well as yours, yours as well as mine,—it will be your fault, your fault entirely. Your blood be on your own head!"

"So be it, Clarence!"

"Damnation, Grace! How can you be so stubborn? Put you in a mortar and grind you with a

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pestle, you 'd go on saying the same thing! Don't, I tell you. Don't put up this front of blank wall to me. I 'm talking for your good. Don't get me where I don't care what I do. Don't turn me into a devil!"

"I think—I really think it would be better if we returned among the others. There can be no use in our talking together," she said, showing every feminine sign of offense and fright.

"No! Wait!"

"I can't!" she cried back from the door to the bright gallery.

With his imperious instinct to have his way, he sprang to stop her; but she was running outright around the curve of the gallery. He could have caught up with her, doubtless, by putting forth his athletic agility; but, having their last race in memory, he was held back by shame at being seen behaving like an idiot for the second time before the same ironical audience. He repented an instant later, and started, after all; but, seeing her descend to the floor, he again lost impetus and stood still, watching her as she rushed—under the impression, apparently, that he was at her heels.

She looked rather silly, he thought, fleeing unpursued, and wondered how soon she would discover her mistake and let up and blush for herself. At the foot of the stairs, he thought, she surely would look back.

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She did—by a swift, birdlike turn of her head over her shoulder; her glance swept round till it located him, standing still, hands in pockets, savagely disdainful witness of her futility.

He thought she would then have stopped short, laughed, got her breath, and, to lend herself countenance, done some such girlish thing as hide her face in the bowl of roses on the piano, or bend it over the pile of music, pretending to look for a favorite piece.

But she continued, more slowly now and deliberately in her retreat, going with an unaccustomed stiff stateliness. Her back, the tilt of her head, as she passed to one side of the staircase and threaded her way amid the chairs grouped about the glass door, had a look of successful contumacy which called forth the response in him of a thrill of fire spreading to the end of every nerve. Two words, stored in what forgotten pigeonhole of memory, leaped from his lips and rang after her, already in the dark outside the house:

"*Hasta mañana!*"

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CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN out of sight of the loungers near the door, Grace ran—along the side of the house, along the front, through the iron gate, wide open for guests, down the street to the corner, around the corner—

There her hand was drawn through an arm, which tended to check her speed.

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" she whispered, and tried to drag the arm along.

"Please not to be afraid. Please believe you are safe," said the looming man, the owner of the arm.

At the affrighted "Oh! Oh!" which she uttered in dismay over his lack of comprehension, he consented, however, to hasten, but with a quiet steadiness.

They had only the length of the Overcome wall to go to reach the alley behind the line of low buildings bounding the Overcome yard. There stood a closed carriage with its waiting horses and driver. In a second she was inside of it; in another second he was beside her; the horses started up and off at such good convenient speed as can be wrung from estimable hackneys.

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"Am I in time? Ought n't—ought n't we to go faster? Ought n't the horses to gallop?" she whispered.

"We have abundance of time," he said.

She took her head between her hands, and there was silence in the coach, parallel, as it were, to the clatter of hoofs outside.

"I was sure you would be there," she said. By this time the red mansion in the midst of its black railings was several blocks behind. "I was perfectly—perfectly sure. Oh, thank God that you were there!"

He made a slight sign in the semi-darkness. He could find no trivial, appropriate thing to say—the moment was too extraordinary, too charged with wonder.

"It came from your saying at the end of your letter, 'Yours to command,'" Grace went on. "I know it is a common form at the close of a letter, but I acted on it as if you had been the one to write it for the first time, and had sincerely meant it."

"It was sincere."

"That, perhaps, is why I believed it. I could n't very well in my letter explain the situation from which I felt I had to escape, but—"

"You told me all I needed to know."

"I—I can't talk about anything very well at this moment. I feel as if I were in a dream. I feel as if my being here could n't be real."

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Again she clasped her head, and breathed hurriedly, tremulously. Of a sudden her breath stopped. It seemed to her that she heard Red Overcome calling: "Grace! Grace!" Mercy of Heaven! Could he—could he, by some inconceivable power of black magic, be really following them? Nothing was impossible with Red—terrible Red!

No, no. They were half a mile away already; he was out in the dark yard, searching for her under the elm, in the corners, and she got the reverberation of him somehow, calling in a subdued, troubled voice: "Grace! Grace!" It was as clear as if she had been there, recoiling from his groping hands.

"Had you not better put on this cloak and hat?" asked Andreas Dane, in the harder, clearer voice of the actual world. He shook out a mantle—the blue of the Madonna's mantle, silken, fragrant, that made lines and folds fit to please an artist. He held it for her arms. He tendered a hat fit to charm a poet—a hat that was as much a hat as Mercury's, with shading brim and sweeping plume. He had remembered even the hat-pins.

She had not the quiet of mind to observe any of this rightly. Wrapped in her blue mantle, crowned with her plumed hat, she continued to be lost among crowding preoccupations.

"After I get to my sister's I will write you. I will also send you money, and when you have the brooch back, this is what you must do. You see,"—

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she smiled with a wan sparkle,—"you see, I am still taking literally that unwary 'Yours to command.' You must do this: Every day there goes to the eleven o'clock mass in the Catholic cathedral a lady in black, rather plump and not very tall—you will know her by her hair, which is snow-white without her being very old, and by her dark eyes with black eyebrows, and her sad look. She wears a silver crucifix; she is foreign. Ask her if she is Mrs. Dolores Overcome, and give the brooch to her, to be given to Miss Marinda, secretly. She will understand."

"Yours to command, Miss Ingalis. You cannot enough believe that I am yours to command."

"Oh, it is all so strange and unthinkable!"

She closed her eyes to try to collect herself. And now she could hear Red Overcome's voice, a little louder and much more anxious: "Grace! Grace!" She could see him at the farthermost end of the yard, trying the doors and shutters of the mysterious, blindly sealed warehouses. One would have thought he might find her there, after all, from the way her heart winced. . . .

But all that was over.

"When I have reached my sister's," she said, "I will write you. Then also I will try to thank you. You must forgive me if I don't try just now. I can't even think at this moment. But that I can never thank you sufficiently, I know only too well."

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"Miss Ingalis, there is one way to pay me—just one. It is to believe absolutely in the truth of 'Yours to command,' and count upon it accordingly."

"Oh, how kind of you, how kind!" she said, but still perfunctorily; then added, aware of her inadequacy: "But it makes it less possible than ever to thank you enough." And again she closed her eyes in the effort to get a grasp on realities. . . . She saw Red Overcome coming indoors; then passing, pale and unheeding, through the mirthful crowd, seeking Theresa and whispering to her. Theresa looked up, startled, rose, and followed him apart. Theresa said, after his communication: "She must have come in by the other door. I 'll run upstairs and see if she 's in her room."

Grace looked up. "I must write a telegram before I leave, and have it ready, so that at the first stop I can send it back to let them know I am safe, or they might spend the night searching for me."

After that there was a long silence, while houses and street-lamps hurried past, and now and then a late lighted shop-window with wares immensely enhanced in brightness. It did not seem to him the hour for offering talk without any reason but good society's abhorrence of silence—which is not to say that he spent the interval in strict dumbness.

"Miss Ingalis," he said, "you have spoken of thanking me! How shall I thank you? I was an ordinary man, a dejected artist. In the twinkling of

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an eye you made of me a knight errant, with the attendant glory and dedication. You lifted me into a Saint George with a princess to rescue from dragons. I rose to altitudes of capacity and force. I became unbelievably quick, resolute, effectual. I am at this moment of a size to defy destiny and conquer any world. All shall go well, now and after, because I am superhumanly determined. Your colors are pinned to my helmet. I have had a chance to serve you. You called on me and not another. And if this should be my one hour of glorified life, if this should be an episode and not a beginning, all the rest will not be too much to pay for it!"

The carriage meanwhile rocked and rumbled on; the hoofs of the horses beat in their moderate, rhythmical way; and Grace, looking out of the window, tried to pay more attention to the landmarks, wishing to know how near she was to her destination. The reason why she said nothing in reply to Andreas Dane's lyrical address was that he had not spoken aloud the things above mentioned, or even said them to himself as clearly as they are here set down: they were the song of his heart-beats. Grace got no echo of them—but she did from his neighborhood derive more and more a sense of safety; she came gradually under the spell of quiet.

When her feet were on the stable earth again, when she was in the lighted station, amid people hasting on their various errands, with all the signs

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around her of practical things,—the big clock, the porters, the ticket-windows,—it was the things of an hour ago that suddenly seemed unreal and like the delusions of a dream.

Of all surrounding her, nothing was so solidly real as her stalwart friend, with the face—as it was now seen in the light—so well remembered, with its look of fine sanity, ability, reliability, combined with that modesty which made him a little awkward, while the attempt to overcome his awkwardness made him a little stiff.

She ceased to be either afraid or in a hurry.

He led her toward a little woman in her best dress and bonnet, who had been on the watch for them and at once hastened forward.

"I have them in my hand!" she said with anxious haste: "the tickets, the berth reservations. And in this bag all the things we shall need."

"This is my mother, Miss Ingalis," said Andreas, "who is going with you as far as you go, to take care of you."

He rewarded the sweet-faced, care-worn, slightly flustered little woman, whom with a darling son's high-handedness he had impressed into service, by a richly appreciative look and the open praise that pleased her while she blushed for it. "She has only one son, but she has a heart big enough for a dozen."

Not to have the dreaded difficulties of travel to meet alone! The tension of Grace's nerves was so

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eased that gratitude for the relief—nay, for the immensity of good these two people were doing her—rose like a warm wave and made her heart brim over. She followed her impulse to take the little mother's hand and clasp it tightly; then, driven to further demonstrations by the urgency of feeling, she kissed the little mother—nowise like a princess bestowing a gleaming order of chivalry, but like a child thanking with its soft, simple body for the comfort received.

These two, with their—thank God!—not too uncommon air of customary truthfulness, trustiness, moral worth, filled her with the sweet sense of having got home, after strange excursions. This—was it not almost too good to be true?—this was the usual, the normal thing: that human beings should aid and benefit one another, should speak the truth; this—and not black villainy! She had returned to a world where she could once more breathe—live. She grasped for a moment with appropriate triumph and gladness the accomplished fact of her escape.

Travelers catching the midnight train saw walking down the railway platform a group of three who had nothing striking about them, except, perhaps, for its very beauty, the color of the mantle worn by the slender girl going between the gray-haired woman and the young man with the bag. But if any among them had been gifted with an especial kind of sight, he would have seen that the girl in the blue mantle was carrying out of the conflict something like a

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chalice, borne as high as her arms could lift it, to keep it safe from the jostlings and the dangers; and in the chalice something comparable to a precious liquid—her inviolate soul.

THE END

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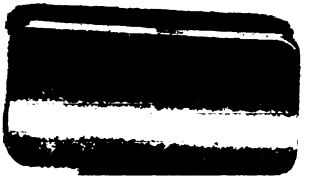

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